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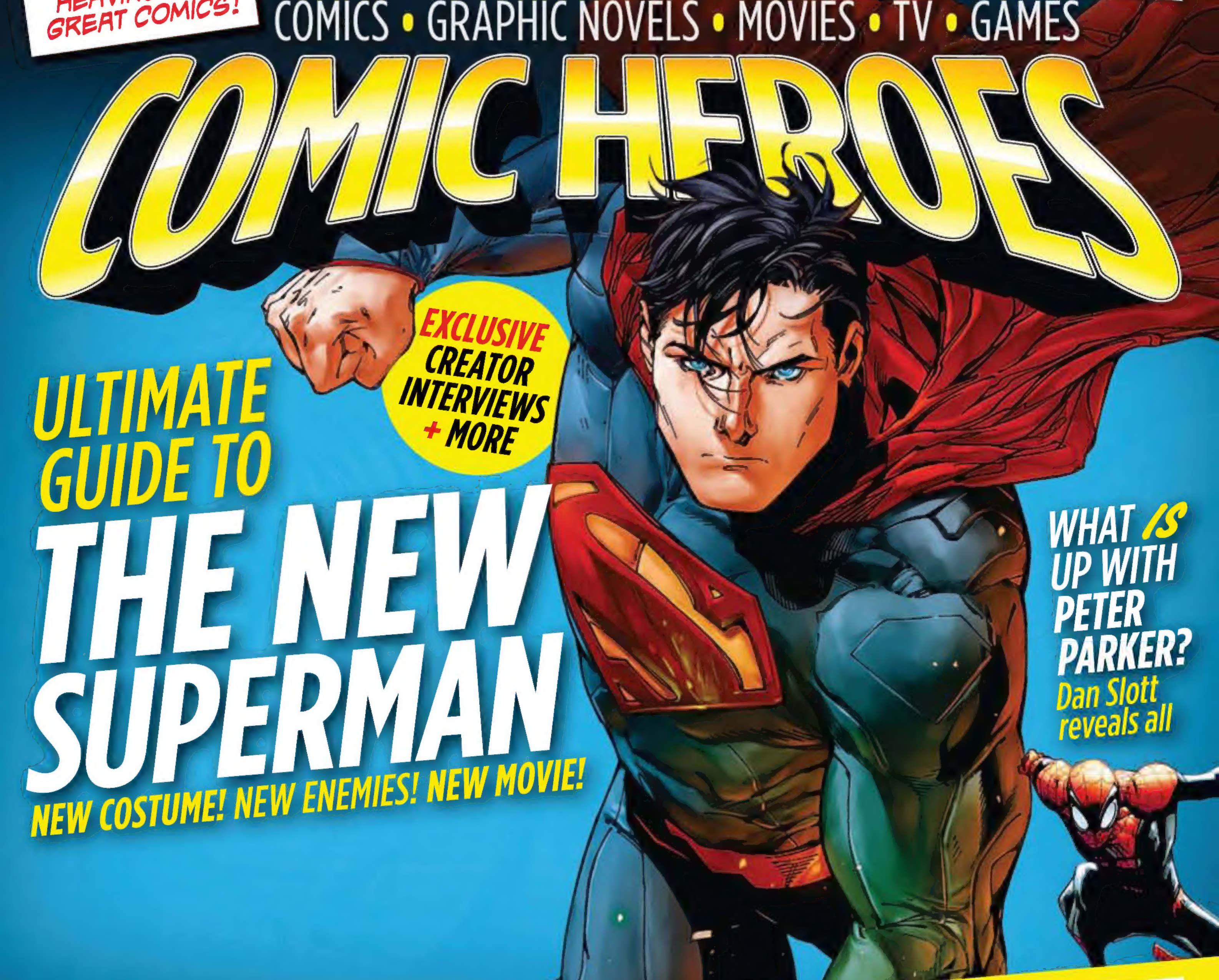

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Comic Heroes May/Jun 2013

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WORLD'S APART

This June sees the release of the first major new big screen reimagining of Superman – the hero who started it all, of course – for some time. Whereas the last effort (Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns*, of 2006) promised much and delivered little, this year's *Man Of Steel* looks to be an altogether more robust proposition.

Reinventing Superman has, of course, become a cottage industry all of its own. On TV the property has been a teen coming-of-age drama (*Smallville*) and a rom-com (*Lois & Clark*) in its time; and, in the comics, someone takes a stab at freshening up Clark Kent every few years. *Man Of Steel* would appear to tap into – amongst other things – the dark, unknowable, otherworldly aspects of the character, and this issue we're celebrating all those lonely, oddball alien heroes who, in the wake of Superman, have kept comics so fresh and full of mystery. Guys like the Silver Surfer, of course, and Martian Manhunter, Captain Mar-Vell and Rom Spaceknight – and bold Earthmen who seek their thrills on strange worlds too, from Green Lantern to Adam Strange.

Adventure is always about taking someone out of their comfort zone, forcing them to experience something new – and that's rarely been more true than with these guys. We salute you all!

Matt

Matt Bielby,
Editor

PS. Check out our competition! UK readers could win a copy of the *Superman: The Ultimate Guide To The Man Of Steel* book, fresh from DK. For entry details and T&Cs head to **www.sfx.co.uk/CH18compo**

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SPACE MEN

For each of our crack team, there's a starman waiting in the sky...

MIKE PERKINS

Of course, in one way I'm my own favourite 'alien hero' – I've lived in the US as an 'Alien of Extraordinary Ability' for some time now! Failing that, it has to be that Brummy-bothering kosmic kangaroo, Skizz.

MARK MITCHELL

Alans Moore and Davis gave us intergalactic bad boys DR & Quinch in a one-off *2000 AD Future Shock*; I love their energy, crazy visuals and ultra-violence, as did many, for they came back multiple times in the mid-'80s.

JAMES LOVEGROVE

Star-Lord – and Starlord. I always liked Peter Quill, and was delighted when Abnett and Lanning rescued him from obscurity. But I enjoyed the Fleetway comic 'editor' too. He was like a cooler, less annoying Tharg.

PAUL GRAVETT

It has to be original '60s space babe, Barbarella – not just for the Jane Fonda movie, but Jean-Claude Forest's comics too. She put erotic fun into sci-fi; once seen, who could forget Dr Durand Durand's orgasm machine?

STEPHEN JEWELL

It's great to see Star-Lord returning in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. Peter Quill's origin – alien dad falling in love with his human mum after crashing to Earth – is essentially Superman's formative years, but with added sex.

MATT BIELBY

I've a soft spot for *The Visible Man* from early *2000 AD*; I was so used to gore-free mad science in American comics, this relentless six-page gross-out sucker-punched me, and the out-there space-based ending rocked.

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

Grand Designs

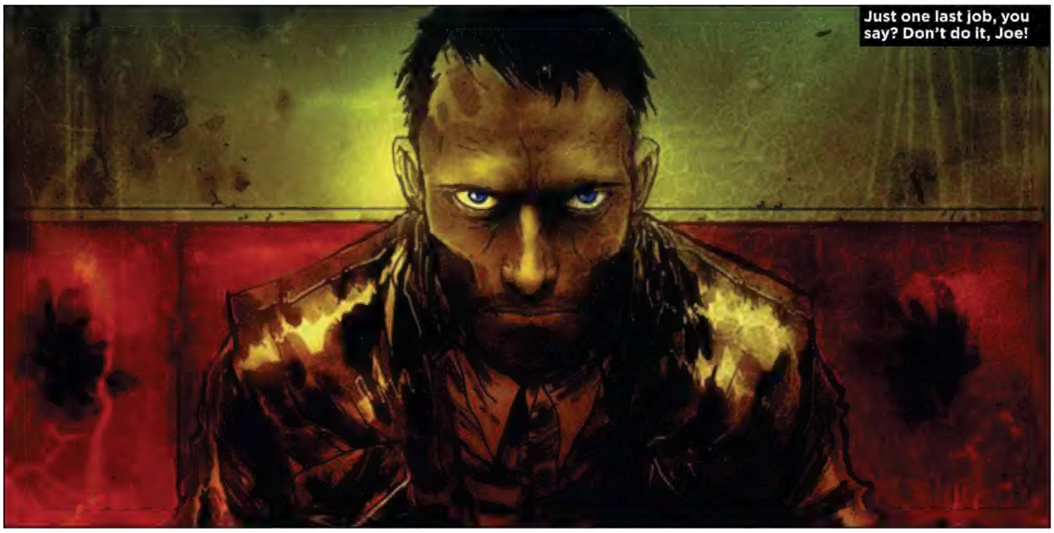
Through his new multi-platform outfit Studio JMS, and Image Comics, comes a relaunch of J Michael Straczynski's Joe's Comics line; first up, the supernaturally-themed *Ten Grand* with Ben Templesmith, with more to come... **By Stephen Jewell**

Joseph Michael Straczynski has spent the past 10 years penning heavyweight properties like *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Superman* and chunks of *Before Watchmen* for Marvel and DC, so it's easy to forget that the *Babylon 5* creator's first foray into comic books was through his own creator-owned material. Now, for the first time since he wrote *Rising Stars* and *Midnight Nation* for Top Cow over a decade ago, JMS is returning to these roots, teaming up with Image Comics to relaunch his Joe's Comics imprint, beginning next month with the Ben Templesmith-illustrated *Ten Grand*.

"After taking two years away from writing monthly comics to focus on graphic novels and miniseries, I felt I'd had enough time away to come back with a vengeance," he says. "That being the case, this seemed like the best opportunity to bring back Joe's Comics, which is something I've been wanting to do for some time. I love working without a net, and doing my own books gives me the chance to do that. I still plan on doing miniseries and graphic novels for the majors, but when I want to play with my *own* toys, I can now do so."

Straczynski wasn't tempted to resurrect either *Midnight Nation* or *Rising Stars* for his reborn line, however, believing that to be the boring, easy option. "I think it's important to come out with something new, rather than just hauling out past work," he says.

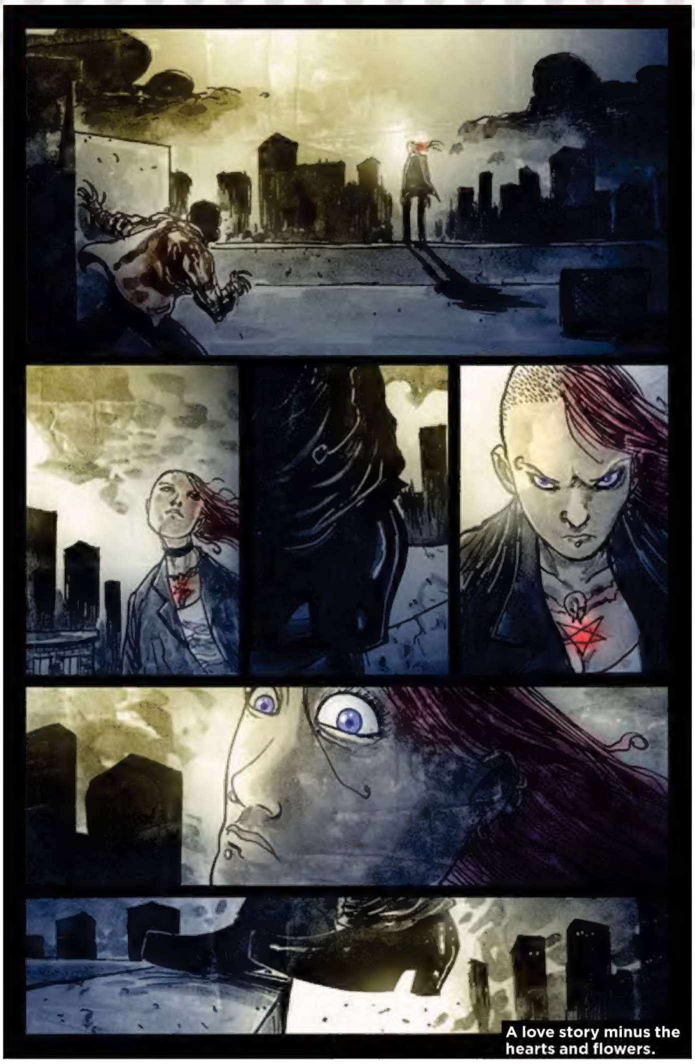
"I wrote those two books because there were things I was working my way through with them. I now have a different set of issues, ideas and themes that I want to explore; ones that don't necessarily relate to those two titles. Coming out with something new and fresh, that represents where I am now as a writer, seemed wiser than going back over familiar territory."



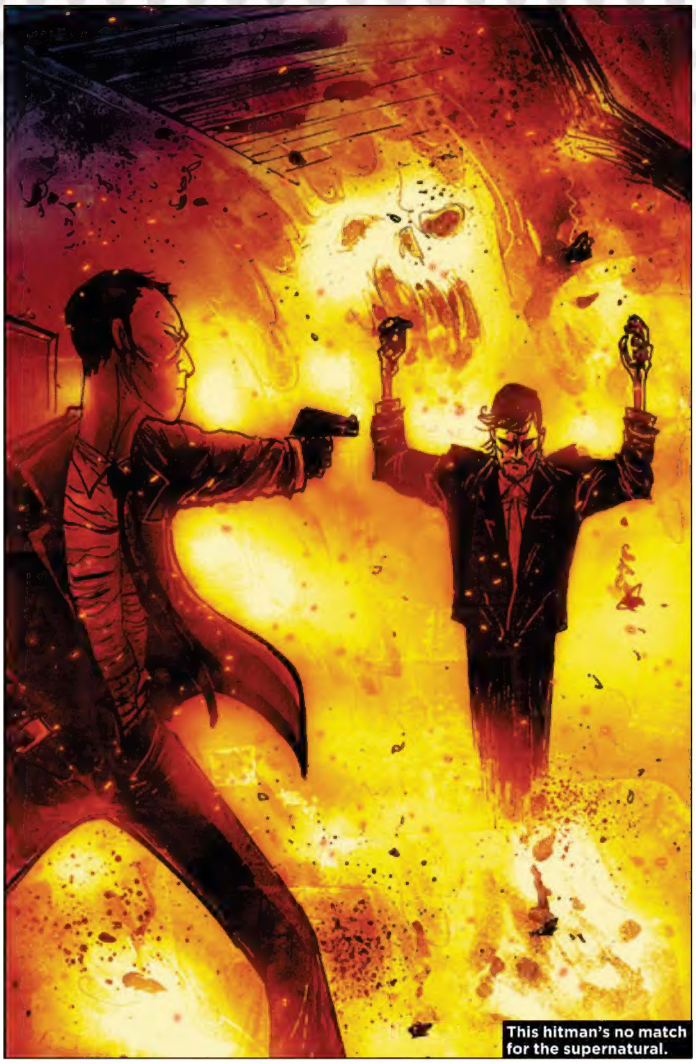
Just one last job, you say? Don't do it, Joe!

TEN FORWARD

With *Ten Grand*, Straczynski puts a distinct spin on the classic trope of a bad guy who agrees to do one last job – only for it to inevitably and tragically go wrong. After falling for Laura, the love of his life, mob enforcer Joe Fitzgerald resolves to give up his life of crime, only to be pressured into taking on a final assignment. He attempts – unsuccessfully – to assassinate a rogue demonologist, who then retaliates by killing Laura. With nothing left to live for, the fatally wounded Joe is visited by an angelic agent, who offers him a



A love story minus the hearts and flowers.



This hitman's no match for the supernatural.

> **“ I love working without a net, and doing my own books gives me the chance to do that ”**

precious extra five minutes with his late beloved if he agrees to use his deadly skills for a more divine, righteous cause.

“Sliding those consequences into the world of the supernatural seemed like a good opening to take the story in a very different direction,” says Straczynski. “It's not just that the job went wrong, it opened his eyes to an entire universe that he didn't know existed five minutes earlier. Prior to that moment, he was the last guy you'd think would end up working for the forces of light, but his love for Laura pushes him to do things no one would have thought him capable of earlier.”

After collaborating with Gary Frank on *Midnight Nation*, and the likes of Brent Anderson and Stuart Immonen on *Rising Stars*, Straczynski has found himself a very different foil in the form of the impressive *Fell*/*30 Days Of Night* artist Ben Templesmith.

“For most of my career in comics, I've been known for books that are visually rendered in very realistic ways,” he explains. “But a big part of the reason for Joe's Comics is to not do things in the same ways that I've done them in the past, so I went looking for an artist who was more stylised and impressionistic. I've been a big fan of Ben's work for a long time, and realised that the unique point of view he brings to his art was a perfect fit for the book, a belief that's been massively reinforced by his work thus far. It's just beautiful stuff, evocative and mysterious and rich, and it's taken the book to a whole new level.”

For his part, Templesmith has enjoyed working with Straczynski after the bleaker approach of his previous partners in crime, which include Warren Ellis and Steve Niles.

“It's probably the closest thing to a legitimate love story you'll ever get from me,” reckons Templesmith. “That's really what *Ten Grand* is at its heart – although that heart definitely goes to some dark places. I've already drawn one of my all-time favourite disgusting concepts/characters, which has all come from Joe's mind, so I'd say it's off to a great dark start. Joe's scripts are easy to interpret, and I hope he's happy with how they're turning out so far. I get a lot of leverage – he doesn't spoon-feed me every angle – so there's room for me to try and do my own thing as well, which is what I always have the most fun with.”

If Templesmith's vibrant art wasn't enough, the first issue – at least – will be enhanced by a special audio performance of some of its dialogue by several voice actors, including Yuri Lowenthal, Tara Platt and former *Babylon 5* man Robin Atkin Downes, which readers can download through specially provided links.

“It's something I've been trying unsuccessfully to nudge the mainstream publishers into doing for a while, so now that I have a venue of my own, we're doing it,” says Straczynski, who hopes that adding such an extra dimension will enrich the comics reading experience. “It's not an audio book in the sense that it relies on you having the art in front of you. The audio doesn't replace seeing the art, it only supports it, so the art remains integral to the process. We're also looking at ways of incorporating the audio into the digital books; I'd love to find a software solution that will let us have the regular comic online, with the option of seeing another version that is just the art, timed to go with the audio.”

The new Joe's Comics imprint is a collab between Image Comics and Straczynski's own Studio JMS initiative, which handles his work across all media; ***Falling Angel****,* ***Guardians*** *and* ***Sidekick*** *are the other announced titles.*

A nestful of Robins, some a tad more familiar than others...

London Super Comic Con II Report

Super Troopers

With Kapow! absent this year, the time was ripe for another newish con, LSCC, to fill the gap. And with such dab hands at this stuff as Neal Adams and Dan Slott on board, it did just that.

Words: **Stephen Jewell** Pictures: **Joel Meadows**

With Kapow! taking a well-deserved breather in 2013, there's been a *Kick-Ass*-sized hole in the capital's comic convention schedule that February's London Super Comic Con had the perfect opportunity to fill. But how, indeed, 'do you follow Stan Lee?' – as the organisers themselves pondered in the programme introduction.

It's only in its second year, but the bang LSCC started with means the event had set itself quite the challenge – and it's true that this year *did* lack a headline-grabbing marquee superstar quite like the legendary former Marvel editor-in-chief, then visiting British shores for the first time in over 40 years.

Nevertheless, this year felt like an exceptionally well-rounded show. Ostensibly headed up by a double bill of Neal Adams and J Scott Campbell – and with a formidable under-card of top artists and writers, including George Pérez, Herb Trimpe, Rebekah Isaacs and Bob Layton – the indisputable star of the show actually turned out to be *Superior Spider-Man* writer Dan Slott. Whether by sheer coincidence or cunning planning, the presence of the resident *Spider*-scribe turned out to be a perfectly timed masterstroke – just two months after the dramatic apparent death of Peter Parker in *Amazing Spider-Man* #700 and the subsequent emergence of Otto Octavius' brand new Superior Spider-Man, the wall-crawler's popularity has rarely been higher.

Subsequently, queues for Slott's signature at the Ltd Edition Stand, where he was autographing a special LSCC variant edition of *Superior Spider-Man* #1 – featuring a cover by Adi Granov, who sat right next to him for most of the weekend – stretched around the block, and some dedicated fans waited in line for two hours to meet him. Ever gracious, Slott signed non-stop on both Saturday and Sunday, only moving from the spot for Sunday morning's packed Spider-Man panel.

Perhaps our favourite panel of the weekend, however, would have to be Saturday's highly entertaining 'Daredevil Through the Ages'. Hosted by David Monteith, it boasted two artistic giants, in the form of Hornhead veterans Klaus Janson and Bill Sienkiewicz, along with the no-less-talented David Mack. Having recently teamed up with Mack and Brian Michael Bendis on the Sightless Swashbuckler's last tale, *Daredevil: End Of Days*, the peerless Janson and equally effusive Sienkiewicz regaled the audience with fascinating anecdotes of working on Matt Murdock's classic late '70s/early-'80s adventures alongside Frank Miller, then at his youthful best.

In contrast, Sunday afternoon's similar 'Batman Through the Ages'

Poison Ivy and Hellboy strike an imposing pose.

Dan Slott drew crowds to the Marvel stand.

George Pérez rocking an awesome robot shirt.

> **“We were treated to a truly heavyweight *2000 AD* panel”**

couldn't quite live up to those lofty standards, although Brian Bolland and Gary Frank certainly made a brave fist of it with their droll asides. Striving valiantly to be heard above the blaring speaker system, as the hapless announcer gave out details of the day's final signings, Neal Adams bizarrely opened proceedings with a song as we waited for David Finch to arrive.

Exploring everything from the appeal of the non-superpowered Dark Knight's everyman status to Ra's Al Ghul creator Adams' assertion that there is no need for Robin, there was certainly interesting stuff here. (Rather ominously – considering his recent demise in *Batman Incorporated* – Adams seemingly regards Damian as 'a little shit'.)

One audience member, however, probably wished that he could have disappeared into the depths of the Bat-Cave after his ill-advised spoiling of the conclusion of the *Arkham Asylum* computer game was greeted with curt disdain, while Adams' aside about the high price of comic books nowadays seemed ironic given that at his stand he was charging £10 for an autograph, £20 for a photograph with the master himself – and £100 for a special *Batman: Odyssey* hardback, complete with a precious sketch!

2000 AD artist Simon Davis.

DREDD RECKONING

While a Spanish airport strike sadly led to Carlos Ezquerra's last-minute cancellation, we were still treated to a truly heavyweight *2000 AD* panel, with not only Bolland but also John Wagner and Alan Grant turning up to talk about all things Dredd, alongside the likes of Simon Davis, Ian Edginton and Frazer Irving. Unfortunately, not every panel was so well attended or received, with US website Comic Geek Speak's trivia quiz only appealing to the most hardcore of fans – perhaps no bad thing, as out of all the panelists only Roy Thomas appeared to know a reasonable number of the answers.

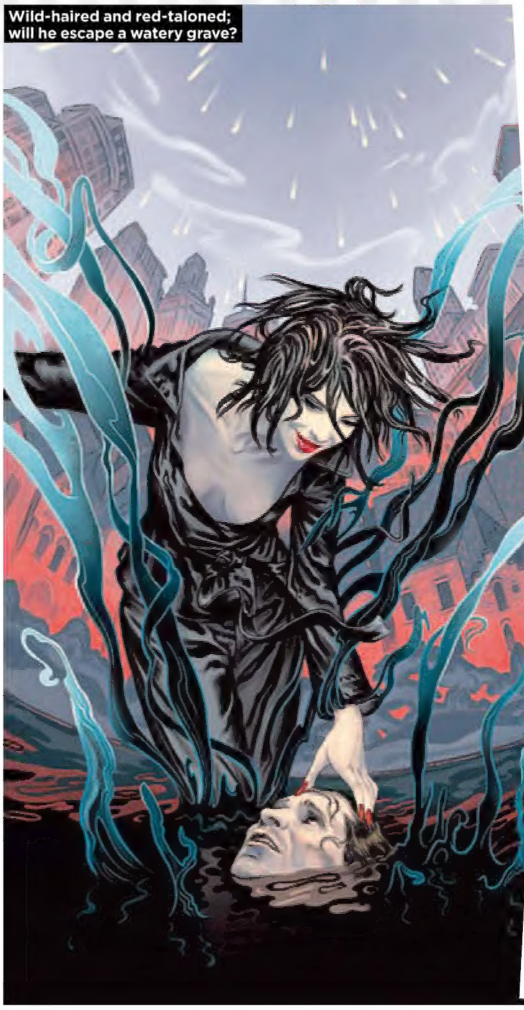
Still, at least the panels didn't appear to be a throwaway after-thought, as they did last year. It's just a pity that along with the overbearing PA, the poor acoustics – largely a result of the panel room being basically composed of a partitioned-off corner of the show floor – meant that many of the guests and audience members were simply inaudible. And although the convention had moved to a more compact space at the far end of the cavernous Excel Centre, the open-plan layout still led to an impersonal, warehouse-esque feel. (This said, the aisles being placed more closely together at least meant that there weren't any gaping empty spaces, as there were in 2012.)

Entertainingly, LSCC was staged alongside the Baby Show and the Beauty Show, which led to some curious crossovers in the surrounding thoroughfares and food halls, as cosplayers mixed it up with hordes of expectant parents and cosmetic consultants.

And if the show floor itself lacked atmosphere, there was certainly plenty to spare at the neighbouring Fox pub later on Saturday night. Compared to the more idiosyncratic likes of Thought Bubble, LSCC can't help but lack the personal touch, but it was pleasing to see UK and US publishers out in force, with the 2000 AD, Avatar and Top Cow booths all proving popular, while the retailers that *Comic Heroes* spoke to all reported doing brisk business on both days.

With signs that the tight-knit British comics community is ready to embrace LSCC as a regular date on the convention calendar, its prospects look good for 2014. Roll on London Super Comic Con III.

LSCC will return in February 2014; visit www.londonsupercomicconvention.com for details.

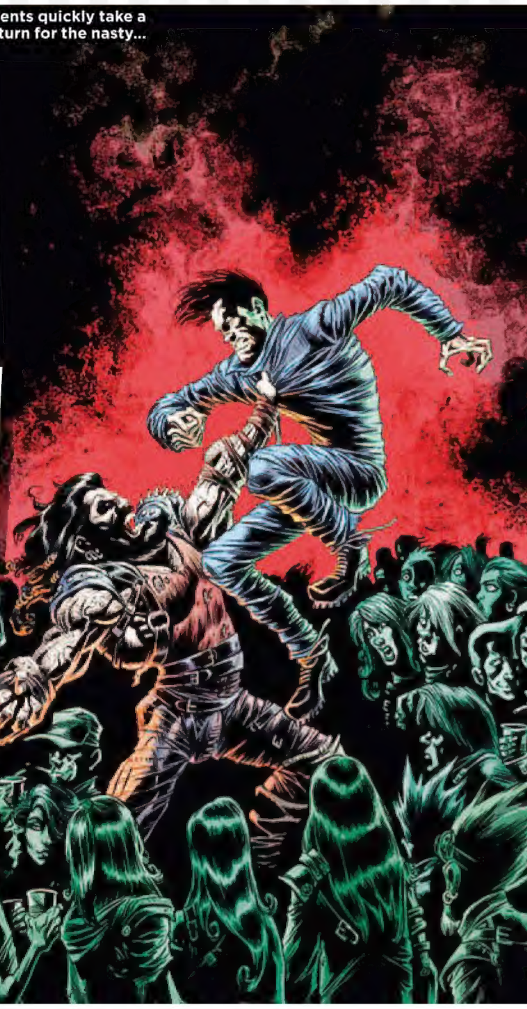


Wild-haired and red-taloned; will he escape a watery grave?

HOUSE OF GOLD & BONES Part 1
STONE SOUR

The (loud!) album that accompanies the comic.

Stone Sour: Slipknot's Jim Root is also a member.



Events quickly take a turn for the nasty...

House Of Mystery

Bloodthirsty mobs, weird refugees and can-you-trust-them? allies in an alternative universe adventure by heavy metal god Corey Taylor; chances are, this comic will rock.

By Stephen Jewell

With Gerard (My Chemical Romance) Way's Eisner Award-winning *The Umbrella Academy* – not to mention Tom (Rage Against The Machine, Audioslave) Morello's *Orchid* – already under their star-studded belts, Dark Horse is garnering an impressive reputation as the comic book industry's most rock 'n' roll publisher, a go-to destination for famous rockers wanting to stretch their comic-writing wings.

Now Slipknot singer Corey Taylor is getting in on the act with *House Of Gold & Bones*, this month's four-part comic book series that ties into his two-part concept album of the same name. (Just to confuse matters, this isn't a Slipknot project at all, but one for his *other* band, Stone Sour – think similarly dark, more melodic, fewer masks.)

"I've got this core story that I wanted to tell, and I thought that comics would be the ideal format," Taylor explains. "It was something that I've always wanted to do, so it was great to find a company that had the same ideas that I did."

TIME OF THE PREACHER

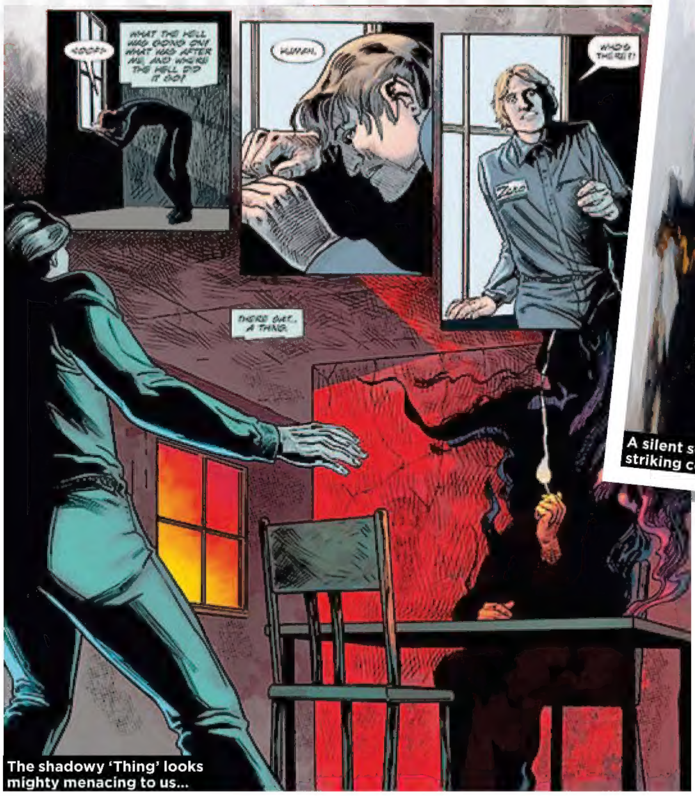
While *House Of Gold & Bones* is his debut comic writing credit, Taylor is no newcomer to the medium. "I've loved comics my whole life," he says. "I was about five when I kind of stole my mum's beat-up comics and I read them from front to back. She was basically a Marvel fan, so she'd collected a lot of those titles. That's how I got into reading, through those comics. I've been into the whole culture ever since, and over the years comics have just got better and better."

Like many people, Taylor fell out of love with comics in the early '90s, before being enticed back after discovering the more cutting edge work that Garth Ennis and Warren Ellis, in particular, were doing for DC's then-burgeoning mature readers imprint, Vertigo.

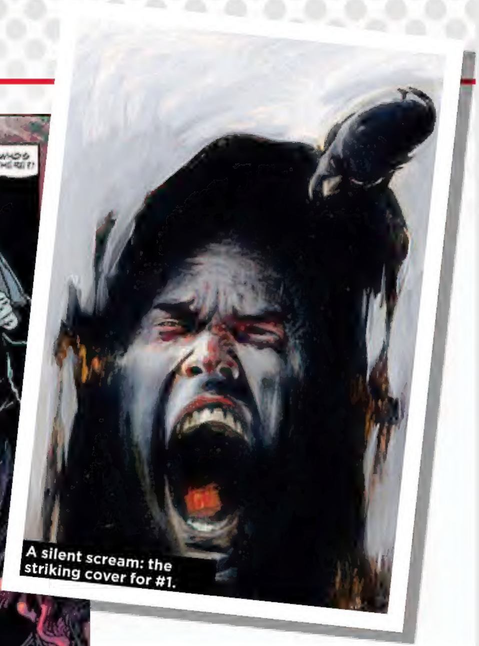
"Those two guys are my favourite writers, hands down," says Taylor. "I just love how far they push things, and *Preacher* is one of my all-time favourite titles. That actually got me back into comics, because for a while – especially around the 'Maximum Clonage' era [Marvel's much derided long-running Spider-Man storyline] – I was going, 'This is just getting a bit *too* weird.' But then, a year or two later, some friend of mine gave me *Preacher* and said, 'You should check this out!' I ended up buying all the back issues – it was one of those titles that I picked up every month. It was cool, I loved it."

Indeed *Preacher*'s energetic, ultra-violent influence can be detected in *House Of Gold & Bones*, not least in the moniker of mysterious supporting character, Pekinpah.

"I've always loved that name, and I said to myself that I was going to


WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON? WHAT WAS AFTER ME, AND WHERE THE HELL DID IT GO?
HUMAN.
WHO'S THERE?!
THERE WAS... A THING.

The shadowy 'Thing' looks mighty menacing to us...



A silent scream: the striking cover for #1.

> **“ *Preacher* got me back into comics – it's one of my all-time favourites ”**

find a way to work it into the story,” says Taylor, who admits that he was inspired by the late director Sam Pekinpah, whose credits include the infamous *Straw Dogs*.

“Pekinpah is almost like a father figure to the main character, The Human. He's got the patience of someone who has been around for a while. He knows all the answers, but he only gives away a few clues here and there, as he encourages The Human to figure it out for himself.”

Illustrated by Richard Clark, the story centres on The Human's desperate attempts to escape from a nightmarish alternate reality.

“It's all kind of wrapped up in this sci-fi world,” Taylor explains. “There are all these crazy characters, and this crazy world that The Human doesn't understand. Essentially it's a morality play. It's about the choices and decisions you have to make, and having the courage to become who you're supposed to be – who you want to be.”

With the songs acting as a kind of soundtrack to the pictures, Taylor has enjoyed the synergy between the two forms.

“It all kind of works together,” he says. “I've split the original short story into two halves, with one on each CD, so you can listen to the music while reading the comic. The music is like the internal dialogue for what's going on with the characters. It gives it more depth, and you can get a different side to the story. That's why I wanted to do it as a comic, so you'd kind of have a third side to it.

“That said, I didn't want to do something just because I could; I wanted to do it because I knew that it would fit really well with the story. I also wanted something that made the whole project even *more* interesting. It's not just me cashing in on my name; I want to make sure that it's good quality too.”

GOLD STANDARDS

With their sinister masks and larger-than-life theatrics, Slipknot could almost have been comic book characters themselves. However, Taylor insists that he has left all that behind him now.

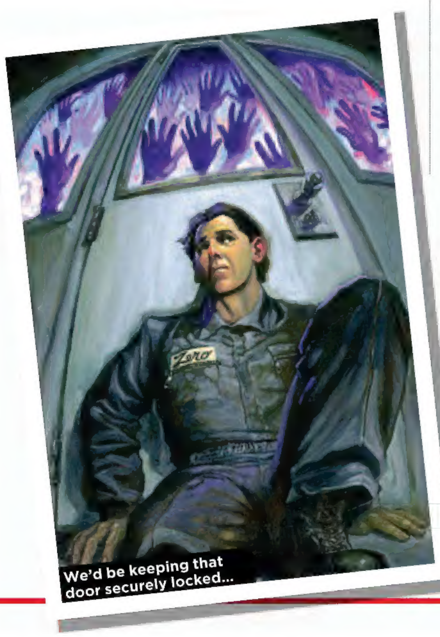
“Mainly for me, as I've gotten older, it's been about figuring out who I'm going to be in the future, instead of holding onto that romantic youthful weirdness,” he reasons. “I'm going to be 40 later this year, and you can't continue to make the same mistakes you made when you were in your twenties. So for me, it's been about trying to evolve into the man I want to be, and a lot of that is in the story.”

One thing he appreciates is the creative freedom that an independent like Dark Horse has been able to give him.

“They just got it straight away, and knew exactly how to do it,” Taylor says. “I've been collecting Dark Horse comics since the early '90s and I love the fact that they take risks. It was the same thing when I did my autobiography, *Seven Deadly Sins*; I wasn't going to let someone else write my story. If I'm going to do it, I was going to do it myself – it was the same with this.

“If we're going to be producing a comic book version, I'll do it myself – even though I've never done one before. I just wanted to make sure that it was something I could do to the best of my ability.”

__House Of Gold & Bones__ (the album) was released in two parts; in late 2012 and on April 8 this year. __House Of Gold & Bones__ (the comic) runs from April 17.



We'd be keeping that door securely locked...

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Damian McGee, Patrick Minnikin, Dave Montrose

Superman wallet image © DC Comics

Matt would like to thank: Kurt Schaffenberger, often overlooked in the annals of classic Superman artists in favour of Curt Swan, Wayne Boring and the rest – but the guy who first made me love and understand the appeal of Big Blue. A German immigrant, his work mostly appeared in *Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane* from roughly '58-'68, where his imagination, crisp, perfect line and great ways with human emotion and a pretty girl both gave his comics the wit, style and sass of a great MGM musical. There's a book of his stuff, *Hero Gets Girl!*, that's well worth checking out; for my money he's one of the ten greatest comic book artists of all time.

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Has there ever been a bigger drama queen than the Surfer?
“My people have lost... the longing to see beyond the veil of knowledge!” he muses – and this before he'd even met Galactus!

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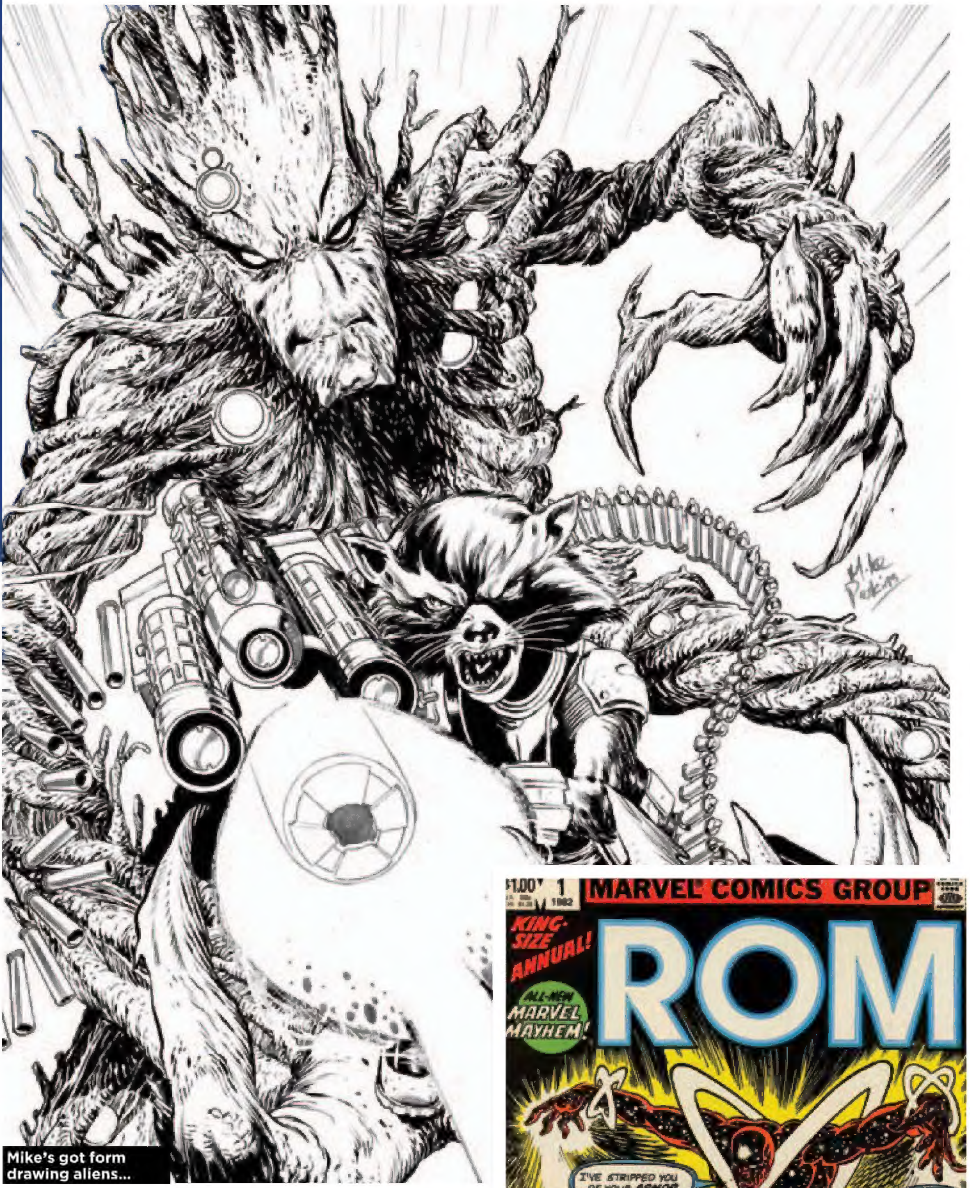
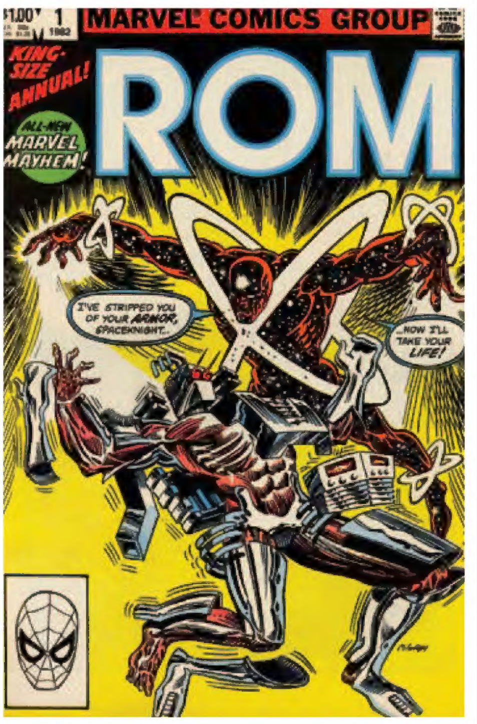
“To catch them if they fall”

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Mike Perkins has a guilty secret – and it's one he shares with a surprising number of top comic creators...



Mike's got form drawing aliens...



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ROM
I'VE STRIPPED YOU OF YOUR ARMOR, SPACEKNIGHT...
NOW I'LL TAKE YOUR LIFE!

Appearing in your own series for 75 issues (and four annuals) is quite a staggering feat for *any* comic book character – outside of the big names, at any rate – and even more so when the basic concept sounds decidedly unpromising.

Rom Spaceknight was, after all, nothing more than the ongoing adventures of a Parker Brothers toy – and a pretty crappy one at that – but something about it caught the imagination of an '80s public, and it endured, spinning around it an extensive mythology of alien cyborg warriors and invading shape-changers called Dire Wraiths. Long ago Rom and his fellow Spaceknights had protected their home planet Galador from just such an assault, and they now seek to keep Earth safe from a seemingly endless stream of equally aggressive Wraith stragglers.

Rom Spaceknight first hit the stands in December 1979, no doubt buoyed by a contemporary slew of sci-fi films capitalising on the success of *Star Wars*. Just looking back on those musty, sweet-smelling books now (and surely the scent of nostalgia is actually that of a pungent, vinegary old comic?) one of the first things you notice are the ads peppered liberally throughout (pretty much after every second page of strip, it seems). There are *Star Wars* figures ('Complete your collection' – apparently after only 24 purchases!); *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* cinema posters and action dolls; *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century* gear; spin-offs from the animated version of *The Lord Of The Rings*. Space (and fantasy) stuff was big, clearly.

For some reason, *Rom* was one of the few comics that seemed to be reliably available every month in the UK, and perhaps for that reason alone, it soon became a firm favourite.

DIRE STRAITS

Rom itself – though nostalgically held in high regard by many of the best known current creators, including Brian Michael Bendis – is a mixed bag of nuts to say the least. The artwork by Sal Buscema is, in my opinion, some of his best – particularly in the first few issues before the deadlines take a slight toll – while Bill Mantlo's deft scripting keeps the story flowing coherently, each issue working well as both a single standalone adventure and as part of an ongoing epic.

Not, of course, that it's perfect. Any objective eye will spot a fair few flaws; stuff that may seem like nit-picking if I was to go through them all in order, but which nevertheless mar the overall effect somewhat, chief amongst which are a few obvious plotholes and rather too much repetition, especially in the early issues. Overall, though, *Rom* holds up rather well – though a modern audience may be surprised at the lack of splash pages and regular, word-heavy use of seven panels to a page.

Rom was cancelled in 1986, and his only semi-revival – in Jim Starlin's *Spaceknights* miniseries of a dozen or so years ago – was careful never to show him or mention his name, for the licence had expired, and Parker Brothers retained his name and likeness. Could he be revived? It seems unlikely – though Parker Brothers is currently owned by Hasbro, and there have been rumours that Disney, Marvel's owners, might just make a bid for the toy firm.

Should there ever be a *Rom* reprise, there would certainly be no shortage of well-known creators ready to take a crack at it – not least the aforementioned *All-New X-Men* scribe. And I'll be right behind him, fending off all rivals with my very own Neutralizer. I'm sure that, together, we could make a decent fist of surpassing even *Rom*'s amazing original run. CH

> **"Something about *Rom Spaceknight* caught the imagination of an '80s public"**

Mike Perkins has a new project with Joe Pruett and Laura Villari; he might talk about it next issue...

Ripped and ready the sequel.

Eastern Promise

X-Men Origins: Wolverine was nobody's favourite film, but this summer's sequel looks to up Logan's game considerably...

Once a fanboy dream, superhero movies continue to dominate summer blockbuster season – and beyond – with a third outing for Iron Man and second bites at the cherry for Thor, Kick-Ass, *Sin City* and more due this year, not to mention a sixth outing (depending on what you count) for Superman and a fifth (ditto) for Wolverine.

The Wolverine is an interesting one, directed by James Mangold, a guy with an intriguing CV that ranges from the excellent (*Girl, Interrupted*; *Walk The Line*) to the dire (*Knight And Day*), and based in large part on the Chris Claremont/Frank Miller 1982 miniseries, the first solo adventure for Logan and the origin of all the samurai/Japan obsession that's become a major part of the Clawed Canuck's backstory.

Yakuza crime bosses, oodles of ninjas and such X-Men staples as Mariko, Yukio, Silver Samurai and HYDRA agent Viper all crop up, while Hugh Jackman looks to be in the form of his life for the role; the action commences on 26 July. CH

Following ***The Wolverine****, the mutant saga continues in* ***X-Men: Days Of Future Past****, out July 2014.*

> **“Hugh Jackman looks to be in the form of his life for the role”**

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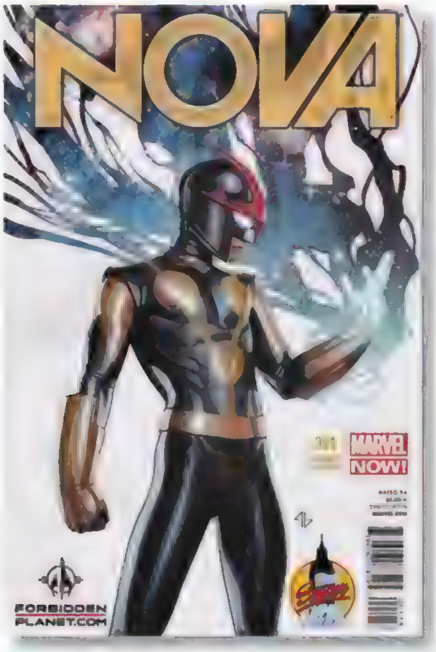
SHAPERS OF WORLDS

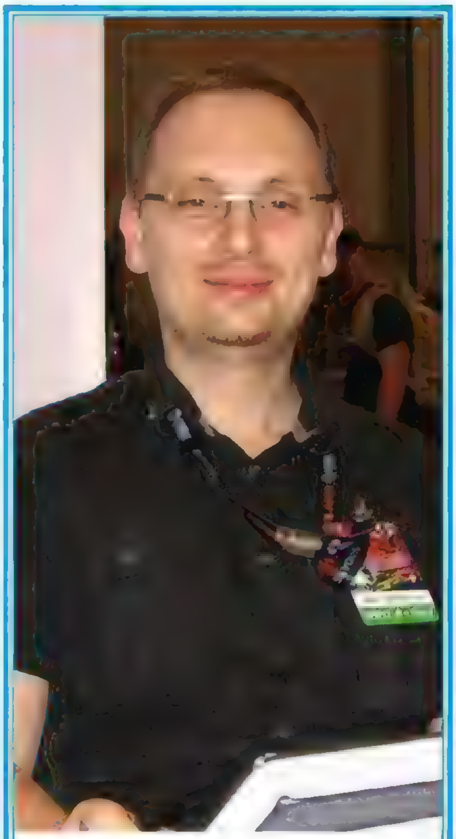
Metal guru

Adi Granov

He's one of the most striking artists in modern comics: his cold, slightly green-hued work giving even the most fantastic tale a photo-realistic veneer.

By Stephen Jewell





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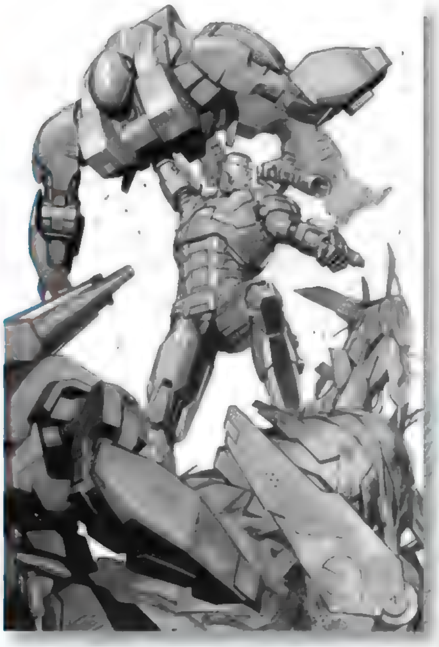
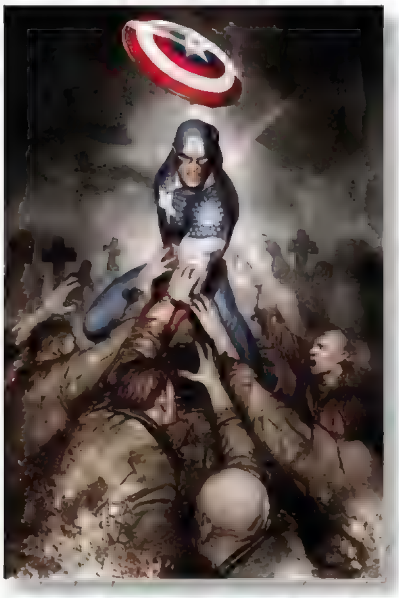


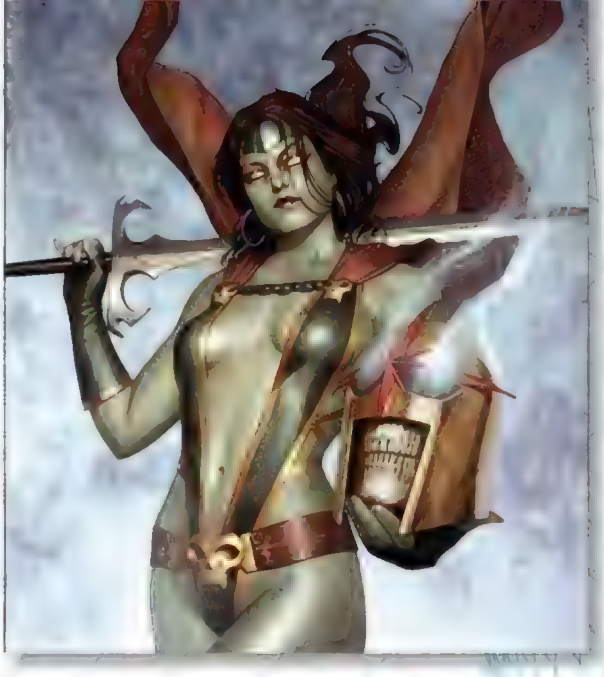
Nobody draws tech like Adi Granov. While Iron Man was originally designed and drawn by Jack Kirby and Don Heck, and the likes of Gene Colan and the John Romita Jr/Bob Layton team have done sterling work on the character over the years, the artist most closely associated with Shellhead over the past decade has surely to be Adi Granov. Renowned for a crisp, moody, painstakingly realistic style, the Leeds-based artist helped reinvent the character when teamed with writer Warren Ellis on 2006's game-changing six-part 'Extremis' storyline.

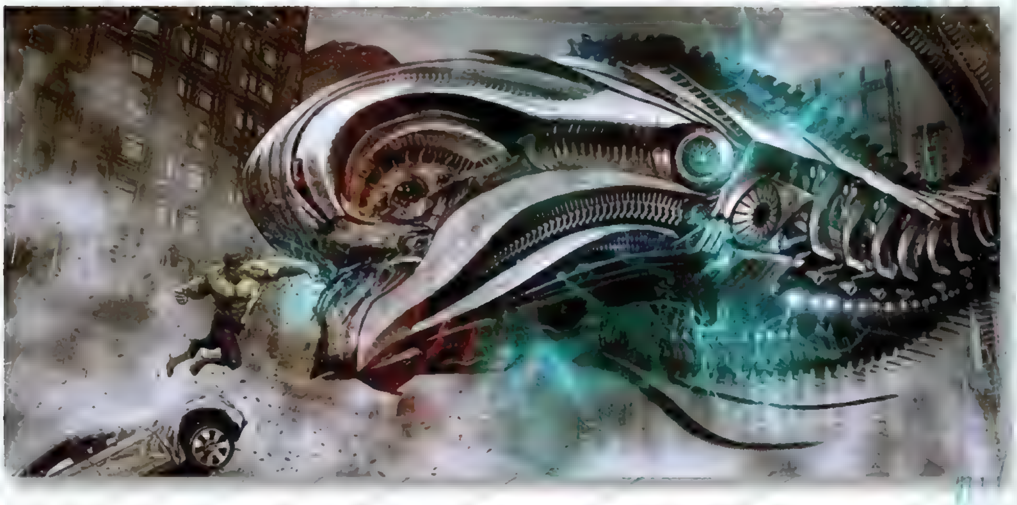
Since then, Granov's contributed numerous covers to the Armored Avenger's various monthlies and worked as a designer on all three *Iron Man* films, as well as last year's *Avengers* big screen extravaganza. Not bad for someone who was largely unfamiliar with the character – and his infamous alter-ego, Tony Stark – until he had actually started illustrating the book.

Comic Heroes: What are your first memories of Iron Man?

Adi Granov: I didn't grow up with him, though I did originally come across him as a kid. I grew up in Bosnia and we got a lot of comics there, but I never actually saw any *Iron Man* issues, so I wasn't really aware of any of the storylines. But I had a sticker of him, and I remember really liking it.







It was only after I was asked by Marvel to do some *Iron Man* covers, about 10 years ago now, that I really got immersed in his backstory, and who the character of Tony Stark was.

CH: 'Extremis', of course, must have been a huge watershed in your career?
AG: You could say that. Iron Man was seen as a bit old fashioned, and had been relegated to a lower-than-B-list character by Marvel. There wasn't really anything to lose by giving him a full revamp, so they asked Warren to write it. I'd been doing covers for the book for about a year, and they'd been quite popular, so they asked me to draw it too. It wasn't a complete reimagining, because Warren paid lots of respect to the backstory, but we just gave it a harder edge and a more modern spin.

CH: What was Warren like in his approach to this reinvention?
AG: I love collaborating with Warren, but you don't necessarily work *with* him as such. He writes the story, and that's it; you just get the script and you draw it. But I really like his writing; he's one of my favourite comic book writers, and he's very good at tailoring his scripts to the strengths of the artist – especially so, with me, after the first issue was done. From the second issue he started adjusting things to fit my art – and it worked much better. I was responding better to the scripts by that point too.

CH: The script for *Iron Man 3* is partly inspired by 'Extremis', of course...
AG: Actually, both the other two Iron Man films have also used bits and pieces of 'Extremis'. It's just that the third movie is more so – I'm not sure exactly how it'll work, but as far as I know they're actually using some specific plot points.

The first *Iron Man* movie was different: more than the storyline, some of the staging was heavily inspired by 'Extremis'. If you look at his escape from the cave alone, some of the shots are directly from the book.

CH: Robert Downey Jr has become Tony Stark in so many people's minds now. Do you think of him when you draw Shellhead?
AG: Not necessarily. Yes, Robert has made the character his own – which I really like for the films, and especially the first one. But, in my head, I still stick to what Warren wrote, because that was my first introduction to Tony Stark. I don't really think of his personality so much when I'm drawing the suit, but when I draw Tony Stark, I think back to the more serious character that we did in 'Extremis'.

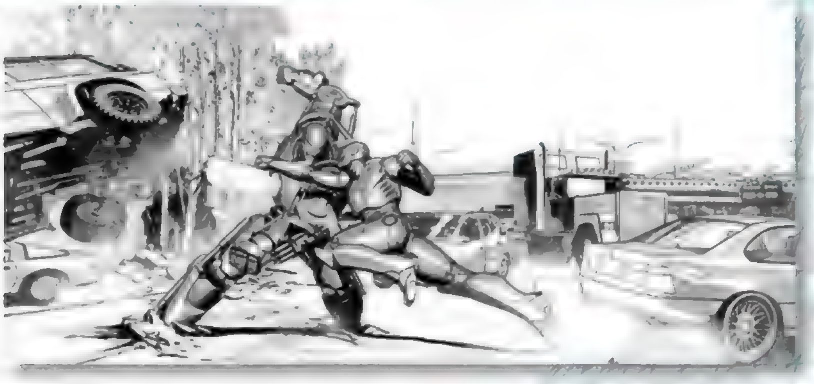
There are many layers to Tony Stark, and Robert does the darkness and the serious bit really well – it's just that he then adds this extra layer of extravagance and humour on top of that, which is something that the Tony Stark in 'Extremis' didn't have.

CH: You've recently been providing cover art for everything from *Nova* to *Ultimate Spider-Man*, but are you planning to return to interiors?
AG: There are a couple of things in the pipeline that I've been talking to Marvel about, but because I take quite a long time doing them, it's a question of finding something that I feel like investing all that effort into. A six-issue story will take me about a year and a half of intense work, which is quite a large chunk of my life to dedicate solely to one thing, so it has to be the *right* thing.

I've also got a creator-owned project that I'm developing, which is coming along slowly. It's just that I'm busy with all this other stuff, so I try not to think about it too much – otherwise I get a bit panicky! CH

Adi Granov's covers continue to appear on many Marvel books; *Nova*, in particular, has rarely looked better.

> **“We gave Iron Man a harder edge and a more modern spin”**



Above: Granov's a master of Marvel covers, including these for *Captain America* and *Nova*.
Left: The artist was instrumental in creating the 'look' of the *Iron Man* films.

Martian chronicles

Matt Kindt

He's the lean, green, alien crime fighting machine of the JLA. Matt Kindt explains why the Martian Manhunter is scarier than Superman and the loneliest hero on the planet, plus what it feels like to be a cat.

By David West

J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter, first appeared as a back-up strip in *Detective Comics* #225 in 1955. The green-skinned alien hero has since become a key figure in different incarnations of the Justice League – and now the Manhunter returns to solo action in a new back-up feature in the pages of *Justice League Of America* too, with writer Matt Kindt at the helm.

Comic Heroes: How did you come onboard the new *Martian Manhunter* feature?
Matt Kindt: Geoff Johns showed me a pitch that he had written a while ago for *Martian Manhunter*. I loved his idea; I was like, 'Man, this is great.' Then many things happened, and the way the project turned out there wasn't going to *be* an ongoing series – but there would be room for a back-up in *JLA*. Geoff was too busy to do it and I was like, 'Well, let me do that'. I like the character a lot, and I love writing for DC. *Frankenstein: Agent Of S.H.A.D.E* had just been cancelled and I was like, 'This would be right up my alley.' So that's how it came about. Then we hashed out some ideas and ways we could use eight-page stories to do something fun.

CH: What's your take on the Martian Manhunter? He was the straight man during the *Justice League* run written by Keith Giffen and JM DeMatteis...
MK: I grew up reading the funny *Justice League*, and Martian Manhunter was always the grumpy, Oreo-dunking alien, which is what I remembered. I did a little more research and talked to Geoff about what we wanted to do, and the more I thought about it the more I realised he is basically Superman – but a little scarier.

He didn't grow up with human parents, so we didn't really know what sort of morals and values he was raised with. He is a transplant to Earth rather than someone who grew up here, so what is his motivation? He and Superman are both basically invulnerable, but Martian Manhunter has shape-changing abilities and mind powers that – to me – put him above Superman. He can do almost anything. If you don't know his motivations it makes him more intimidating. Ultimately he's a good guy, but his techniques might be different from Superman's upfront, clean-cut ways.

WIZ
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BORN ST LOUIS, MISSOURI
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NOW MARTIAN MANHUNTER
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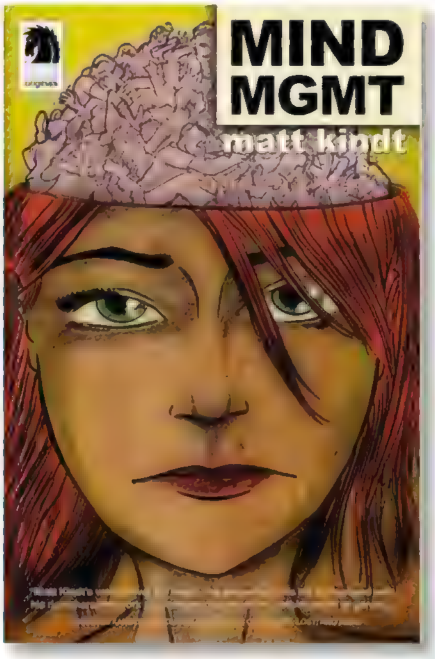
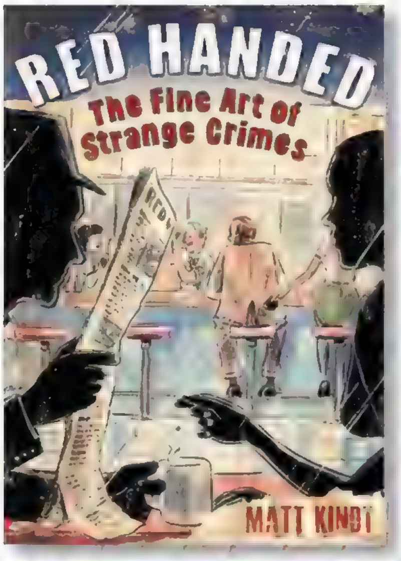
> "He could fit in physically, but he chooses not to. Why?"

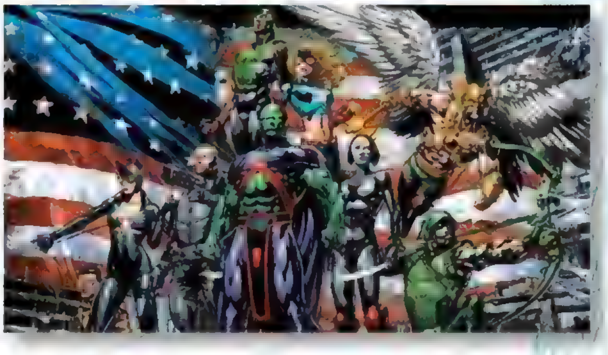


CH: And, unlike Superman, the Manhunter *looks* like an alien...
MK: The thing is he could pass for human. He changes shape. There's something interesting there: he could fit in physically, but he chooses not to. Why? The reason is that he didn't grow up here, and I think part of him wants to be true to where he came from, rather than trying to blend in.

CH: Is it tricky to find challenges for a character with so many superpowers?
MK: Honestly, before I started writing for DC I thought the character I would least like to write would be Superman. He's the *worst* – he can do everything, he can never die, he's basically invulnerable. Then I ended up writing this 30-page digital *Superman* story and I realised how much fun it was. There's so much you can do



Super Spy
The Lost Dossiers
This book is for emergency use only.
Follow the instructions closely and destroy this book upon completion.



MATT KINDT
Author of SUPER SPY
REVOLVER
VERTIGO

visually with someone who can hear everything, smell everything, see everything, do anything. So what's it *like* to hear it all? How do you tune out some of it? If you can move as fast as the Flash – last time they raced I can't remember who won – then what's your day like? What is it like to have that power?

It's the same for Martian Manhunter. What's it like if you can change yourself into a cat? What does *that* look like from the inside? That's really interesting to me.

CH: In the '50s J'onn J'onzz was a detective in his human guise. Will your Manhunter have that film noir, mystery series element?

MK: He's dealing less with murder mysteries and more with superheroes and politics. He can look like anybody and walk through walls, so his role is going to be more like a spy, working behind the scenes to manipulate events and doing things surreptitiously.

The one thing I always think about when you write anyone involved in espionage is: they're isolated. They've taken on a role and personality to do this mission for the greater good, but at the same time they're basically lying to everyone. No one knows who they really are. That's what's interesting to me about the character. Not only is he this superspy of the JLA, but he's the last of his kind too. It's triple loneliness. He's the ultimate sad character, which makes him really fun to write.

CH: What makes the Manhunter the right person to lead the JLA?

MK: The one thing he does share with Superman is his moral code. Coming from an alien culture gives him a unique perspective: he can look at Earth and think, 'This isn't right.'

CH: How closely will your strip tie in with what Geoff Johns does in *Justice League Of America* itself?

MK: The stories are going to work together. What Geoff and I talked about was him writing the issue and then giving it to me, then I'm planning Martian Manhunter's stories around what he did – telling the back story of the main narrative, the things he did during that issue that you didn't see but that are critical to his character.

CH: Is the Manhunter the last surviving Martian, or will we see the White Martians and/or Miss Martian?

MK: That would be awesome, but I honestly don't know. Writing an eight-page story is fun, and I cram in as much as I can, but I don't know how much I can do without him having his own series. Long term, I'd love to. CH

***Martian Manhunter* continues in the pages of the new *Justice League of America*, DC's biggest hit comic in an age.**

Above: Kindt's currently winning fans with Martian Manhunter; he's also written several graphic novels, including *Revolver* and *Super Spy: The Lost Dossiers.*

Game on

Christopher Shy

Channelling everyone from HR Giger to Enki Bilal, movie concept artist and graphic novelist Christopher Shy brings an eerie gothic sensibility to everything he does, from witch-filled fairytales to the impressive expanded universe of the *Dead Space* games...

By Matt Bielby

Most of the writers and artists we talk to at *Comic Heroes* work mainly on serialised stories – longish tales designed to be broken into small chunks for publication as a succession of 20-page American comic books, or as yet shorter episodes in an anthology like *2000 AD*. The European tradition, however, is different – it emphasises the longer 'album', where the story is either standalone, as with most prose novels, or (where serialised) at least comes in much heftier, less frequent lumps.

Christopher Shy – also occasionally known as 'Ronin' – is unusual in that his comic strip work and his fantasy and SF painting coexist side-by-side: one month he'll be working as a movie concept designer (notably on the 2009 remake of *Friday The 13th* and the yet more recent big-screen incarnation of *Conan*) and the next on a moody, horror-themed graphic novel, sometimes original projects and sometimes adaptations of an existing game or movie. His work is a moody, murky mix of photography and digital painting – think Clint Langley meets HR Giger – and is well represented by his pair of 100-plus-page spin-off graphic novels from the hit *Dead Space* series of third-person shooters, survivor horror tales set in a 26th century of blue-collar space miners, strange alien artifacts and mutant zombies.

Shy's first exploration of this universe – *Dead Space: Salvage*, by Anthony Johnson – was completed in 2010, and now *Dead Space: Liberation*, this time with Ian (*The Red Seas*, *Ampney Crucis Investigates*) Edginton, explores the events leading up to the current *Dead Space 3*.

BORN KENTUCKY
HIGH SOUL STEALER
NOW DEAD SPACE: LIBERATION
MORE www.studioronin.com

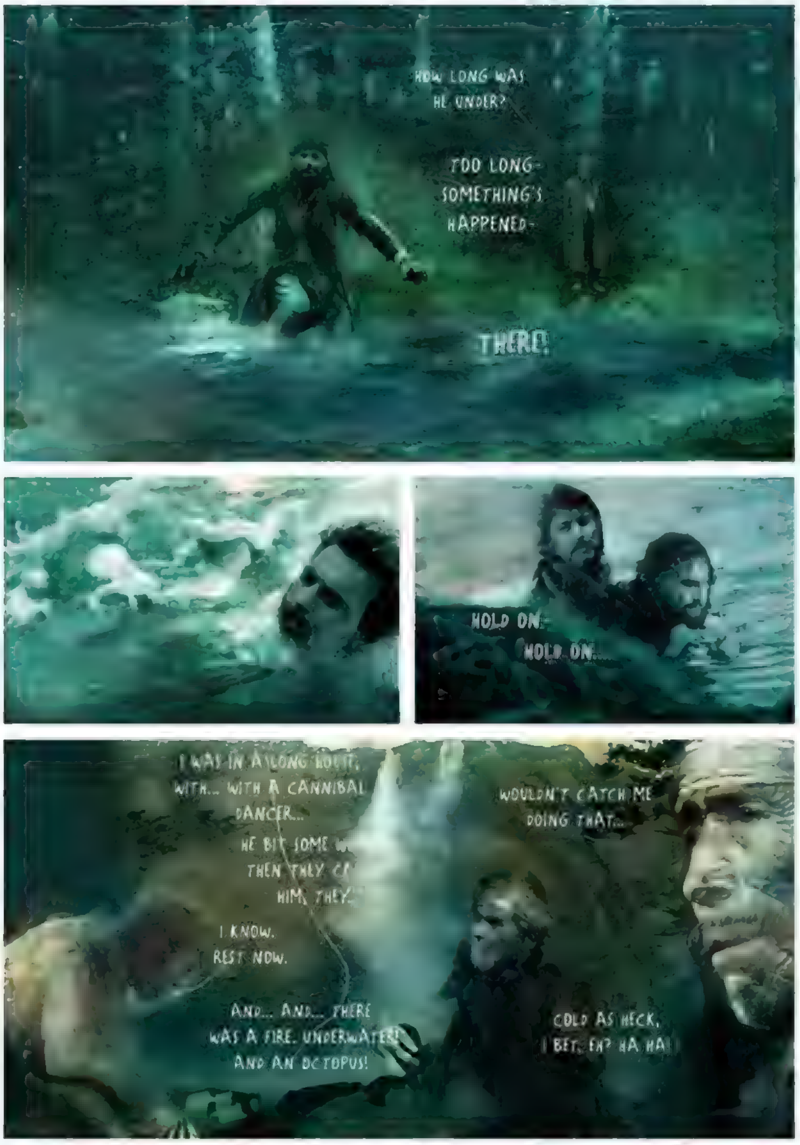
Comic Heroes: How familiar were you with the games these graphic novels are based on before you started working on them?
Christopher Shy: Oh, very familiar. I was a fan of *Dead Space* before coming on board to illustrate *Dead Space: Salvage*, and continue to be a fan today. EA and Visceral Games have always been very supportive of my vision on these books: there were things in this universe I knew I needed to be careful of, terminology I wasn't as familiar with, so I asked lots of questions about where they planned on taking the franchise so as not to step on any of the canon. Cate Latchford and Chuck Beaver at Visceral were always on hand to answer any questions, and give me any reference I might want to look at.

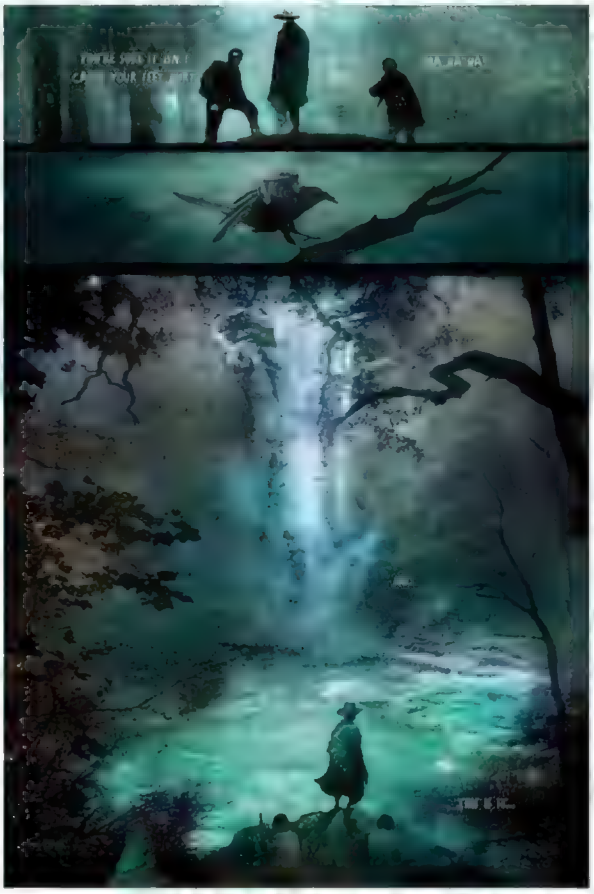
CH: The graphic novel is very atmospheric, with plenty of massive-sized panels. Were you working to a conventional script by Ian, or something more loose?
CS: It was certainly looser than I'm used to, but Ian constructed a tight story that was easy for me to get my head around. There's a difference between single issue comics and a long-form graphic novel; I only do graphic novels, so when I approach a book I look at the project as one long movie. I never lock myself into a panel structure, and rarely receive that kind of direction; rather, I look at entire sections, and let the narrative structure work at its own pace.

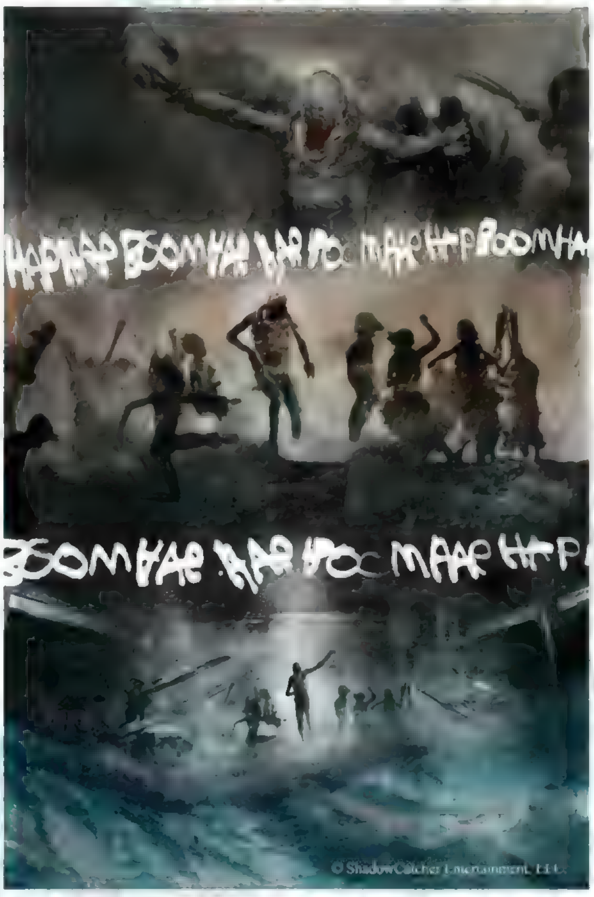
It's not dissimilar to a film: sometimes you can tell when a scene needs extra coverage, or it simply needs two pages for dramatic emphasis. That's really what makes the book work as a whole. There are times when a writer has a specific scene they are attached to, and at that point we work things out very carefully. But, in general, once I take over I'm making a lot of decisions on pacing and editing as we go. Then, at the end, we do an edit together. I've always found this method produces the best results for my style of book making.

CH: Many of the graphic novels you've worked on have been adaptations of films and games. What appeals to you about the medium, and how do you approach it?
CS: I really like long-form narrative structures, and I certainly like completion. Single issues don't interest me, because I like to choose my own act breaks, and lead-in pages to set tone and mood. The single issue structure would upset that.

Actually, none of the books I have finished are film adaptations – with the exception of *Pathfinder*, which was completed before the film and then edited out of my hands, to better reflect the motion picture before its release. That was


HOW LONG WAS HE UNDER?
TOO LONG- SOMETHING'S HAPPENED-
THERE!
HOLD ON-
HOLD ON...
I WAS IN A LONG HOUSE, WITH... WITH A CANNIBAL DANCER...
HE BIT SOME
THEN THEY C
HIM, THEY...
WOULDN'T CATCH ME DOING THAT...
I KNOW. REST NOW.
AND... AND... THERE WAS A FIRE. UNDERWATER! AND AN OCTOPUS!
COLD AS HECK, I BET, EH? HA HA!

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> **I approached it as a fan, but also treated it as if it were my own book**

something that greatly pissed me off, because my version was based on the screenplay, not the film, and reflected what [screenwriter] Laeta Kalogridis had written, with some simple expansions. Her screenplay was wonderful, and very different than the film. To my mind the editing destroyed my book, and her screenplay too. I made sure that never happened again.

In the case of *Dead Space*, EA was very upfront about the fact that they did not want to simply rehash the game, but, rather, were keen to let me expand on the *Dead Space* universe, bring my vision to it, and create something new. I approached it as a fan – but also treated it as if it were one of my own books.

CH: Who are your artistic influences, particularly with regard to the style you're using here?

CS: With *Liberation* I was certainly looking more towards the fantastic work that had been done by the artists at Visceral. Since this book needed to merge more or less seamlessly with the events of [the game] *Dead Space 3*, I looked at a lot of the details of the technology – especially the rig suits, and weapons being used.

I did a significant portion of concept art beforehand too, and worked out – and simplified – sequences to bring as much drama as possible to it. Of course, Ian had already done the heavy lifting in writing it, and Chuck and Cate were onboard at Visceral to make sure we matched everything up at the end. I played around with suit designs and gave some of it my own twist, but, really, most of the credit goes to the design team at Visceral on this one; I just put the pieces together in my own fashion.

CH: What aspects of, or sequences from, *Dead Space Liberation* are you most pleased with?

CS: I would say the moments that Ellie and Carver share onboard the ship. I think that sequence worked out very smoothly, and we were able to develop Carver more fully. Carver became less of an action hero and more of a tragic figure in that part, and that really anchored the entire book for me. CH

Above: Shy's stormy-hued *Dead Space* work mixes photography-like realism with a Giger-style dash of the fantastical.

***Dead Space: Liberation* is out now; Shy's own projects, including the impressive original novels *The North End Of The World* and the *Soul Stealer* trilogy, are also well worth seeking out. Go to www.blackwatchcomics.com.**

Celtic hero

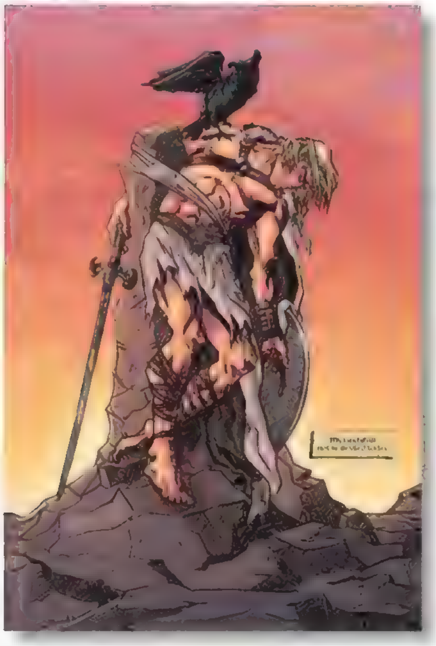
Will Sliney

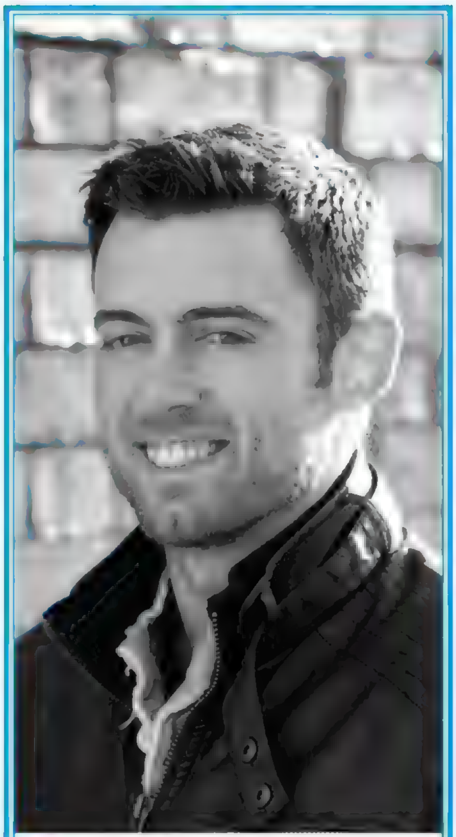
Part of the 'Murphia' now making big inroads into American comics, Will Sliney has landed a big gig at Marvel – and has his own graphic novel hitting book stores too...

By Stephen Jewell

Since starting out on small press publications like *FutureQuake* and *Atomic Rocket Group 66*, Will Sliney has certainly enjoyed a rapid rise through the ranks of the comic book industry. Impressively for a newcomer, the Cork-based artist has jumped right in with recognised properties, initially enjoying a 28-issue stint on *Farscape* for Boom! Studios before a couple of cool jobs at Image. First he teamed up with Tony Lee and Lee David Zlotoff on their *MacGyver* five-parter, then he joined his old mate Ben McCool and Nate Cosby for a spell on *Pigs*.

Big stuff, but there was bigger to come, for now he's making his mark at the House of Ideas as he and writer Cullen Bunn breath some spectacular new life into Marvel's notoriously difficult-to-sell non-team, the Defenders. Now boasting a near-unique all-female line-up, *The Fearless Defenders* has become one of the best titles on the racks. And if that wasn't enough, the prolific illustrator has also written and drawn *Celtic Warrior: The Legend Of Cú Chulainn*, a 128-page graphic novel about the famous Irish hero which will be published first in Ireland by O'Brien Press, before being serialised internationally.





BORN IRELAND

HIGH MACGYVER

NOW FEARLESS DEFENDERS

MORE sliney.blogspot.com

> **“I really like Dr Annabelle Riggs – a totally new character”**

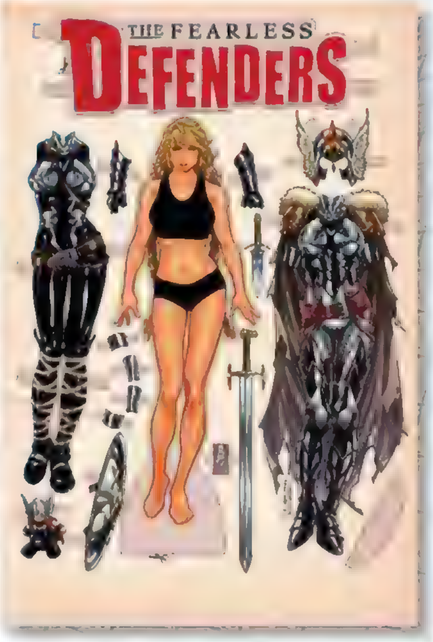
Comic Heroes: There haven't been many Irish comic book creators, but suddenly we're seeing a whole slew of them...

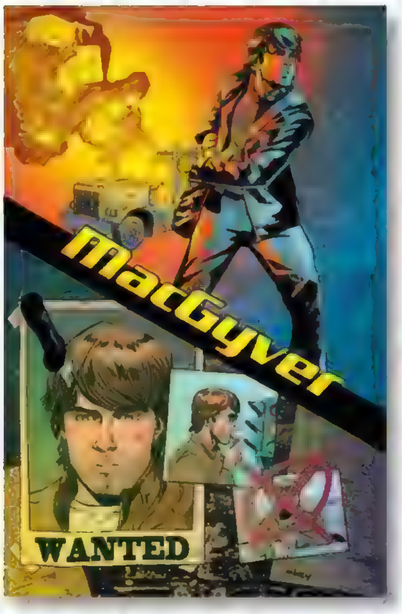
Will Sliney: Ten years ago, when I first met [fellow Irish artist] Declan Shalvey at a pub for the first time, we thought we were the only two people doing comics in the whole of Ireland. But it's really been exploding recently in terms of creators getting involved, because people are now able to see that it can be done from here.

There wasn't really an online presence of contactable creators until six or seven of us set up Eclectic Micks, which was our own little blog. People then caught onto us, and we've since gone further with our careers – but now the next generation is coming through, which is way wider again.

CH: You've done a few issues of *Pigs* with Ben McCool and Nate Cosby lately...

WS: Ben is a really good friend of mine; I know him very well. I was living over in New York for a while in 2010, and I spent a lot of time with him in the pub watching the World Cup. He needed someone to come in and help out on *Pigs*, so that's how I ended up doing that – though he made me draw some pretty dark, twisted stuff!





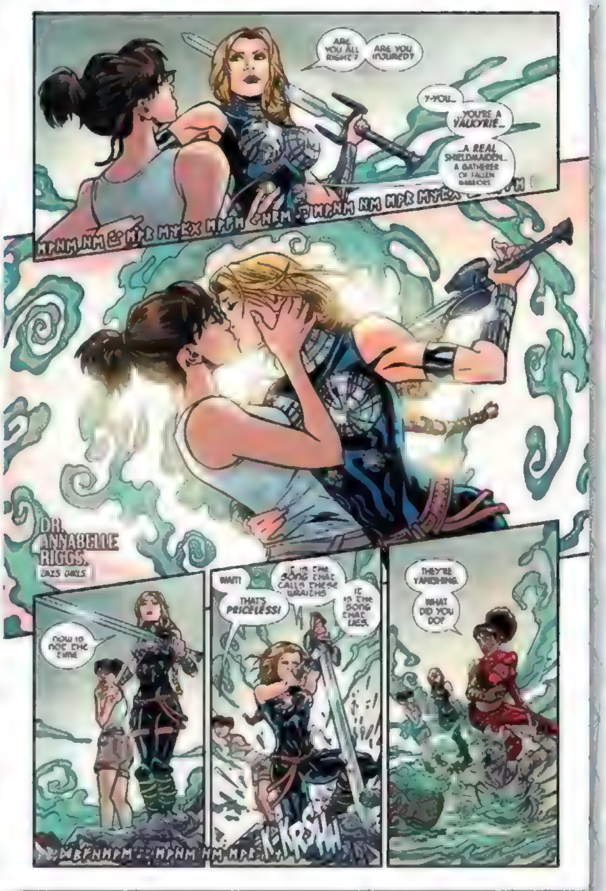
CH: As you say, you're good friends with Declan Shalvey, who is currently working on *Venom* with *Fearless Defenders* writer Cullen Bunn. Did he help you get your big break at Marvel?
WS: Not at all, but it's a funny coincidence because we've both worked for the same companies all the way along, and he's now really mad with me because I've gotten to do a #1 issue of my own ongoing book, and he hasn't [laughs].

I'd actually been on Marvel's radar for a few other things over the past couple of years that I'd never quite landed. Then, at last year's DICE convention in Dublin, I got to spend some great face time with [Marvel editor] CB Cebulski. He was like, 'Great, you've got to the level now where we're ready to use you.' The next week I was over in New York for Comic Con and I signed the contract for *Fearless Defenders*, and it's just gone from there.

CH: So, how did the Fearless Defenders team come to be entirely made up of women?
WS: It was important for the story, and we certainly didn't want it to be just some random thing. Valkyrie needs to recruit some Shieldmaidens, so they have to be women. And if she doesn't do it quickly, the old Shieldmaidens – who have since turned evil – will rise from the dead. That void needs to be filled, so she's going around, starting to pick them. But she doesn't know if they're all going to be worthy, so some will come onto the team but some of them won't.

CH: How are you enjoying the visual contrast between the Fearless Defender's founding members, Valkyrie and Misty Knight?
WS: They're completely different characters, as are all the ones we've added since, so I wanted to get across those differences; you know, how they even carry themselves differently.

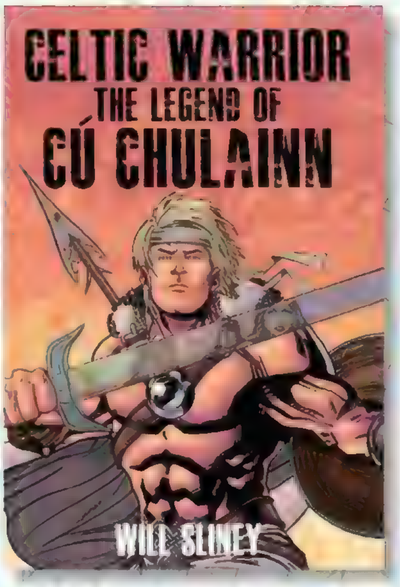
I also really like [civilian archeologist] Dr Annabelle Riggs, who's a completely new character. Cullen has a brilliant plan for her, and you won't be able to predict where that's going to go. But it will be a huge part of the book, and very powerful. A lot of people have said that they really like her, and quite a few girls have told me that she really looks like them, which means that they're relating to her.

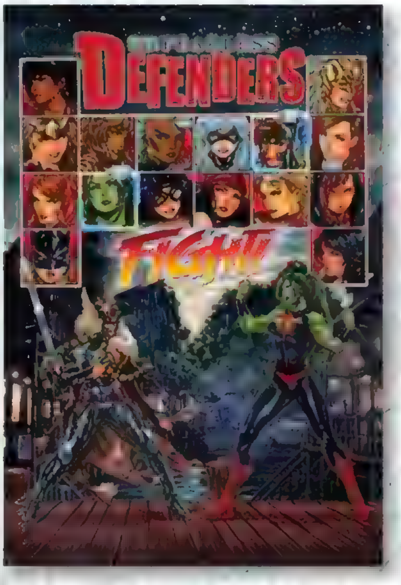

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
ARE YOU INJURED?
Y-YOU...
...YOU'RE A VALKYRIE...
...A REAL SHIELDMAIDEN... A GATHERER OF FALLEN WARRIORS
DR. ANNABELLE RIGGS.
NOW IS NOT THE TIME
WAIT!
IT IS THE SONG THAT CALLS THESE WRAITHS
THAT'S PRICELESS!
IT IS THE SONG THAT LIES.
THEY'RE VANISHING.
WHAT DID YOU DO?
K-KRSHH

That said, the roster is going to constantly change. I've just been given the script for #5, where I have a spread of about 20 female heroes running towards you!

CH: What's it been like working with Cullen Bunn?
WS: He's very collaborative. We're constantly chatting on Gchat, and he asked me at the start who I'd like to draw. The book was his pitch, so he's really gone for it. He did *Fear Itself: The Fearless* miniseries last year, and he planted the seeds for this book right at the end of that. He's given me some really great stuff to draw too, such as in #2 where they go up to Asgard to meet the All-Mothers. It's a new design for Asgard, but I was a huge fan of J Michael Straczynksi and Olivier Coipel's run on *Thor*, which is one of the books I constantly look through. Even before they go to Asgard, they go to Bill's Diner in Broxton – and I got to draw some of the regular random locals in the background.

CH: Your graphic novel *Celtic Warrior: The Legend Of Cú Chulainn* is also released shortly...
WS: Cú Chulainn is a very popular Irish character. Michael Fassbender wants to do a movie about him, so I wanted to get a book out there first that was like a full version of the story from start to finish. It's an old, old story that has been around for 2,000 years, and it's been pulled from all these ancient documents that survived after the Vikings invaded Ireland 1,000 years ago. We've only released a few drawings, and already people are using them as kind of Cú Chulainn's official look.





Above: Sliney's run on *MacGyver* was a hit with the fanboys and he tackles another iconic figure in his graphic novel, the age-old tale Cú Chulainn. He's currently busy on Marvel Now!'s *The Fearless Defenders* alongside *The Sixth Gun* scribe Cullen Bunn.

***The Fearless Defenders* continues every month, from Marvel; *Celtic Warrior: The Legend Of Cú Chulainn* is out now in Ireland, elsewhere soon.**

Anger management

Rob Williams

Starting with *Cla$$war* – his ambitious, satirical Com.x debut with Trevor Hairsine – Rob Williams has a history of finding smart new takes on the superhero genre. Now, with *Miss Fury*, he gets to reinvent one of the medium's most compelling forgotten heroines...

By **Matt Bielby**

British writer Rob Williams is one of the current crop of *2000 AD* guys – undercover Judge saga *Low Life* is one of his, and *The Ten-Seconders*, about humanity's desperate fight back against invading super-powered 'Gods' – who is also doing very well Over There. He's written *Ghost Rider*, *Uncanny X-Force* and *Daken: Dark Wolverine*, among others, for Marvel, plus a number of big-name licensed properties at other American publishers: *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* for Dark Horse, *RoboCop* at Dynamite.

Now, as part of Dynamite's ongoing reinvention of classic pulp characters – the Shadow, the Green Hornet and others all currently have their own titles, and even '30s blind avenger the Black Bat boasts a new ongoing, spinning out of the hit crossover *Masks* – comes his take, with artist Jack *'Red Sonja'* Herbert, on *Miss Fury*: a slinky, aggressive, crime-fighting Catwoman-alike who first appeared as a Sunday newspaper strip in 1941…

Image © Luigi Novi/Wikimedia Commons

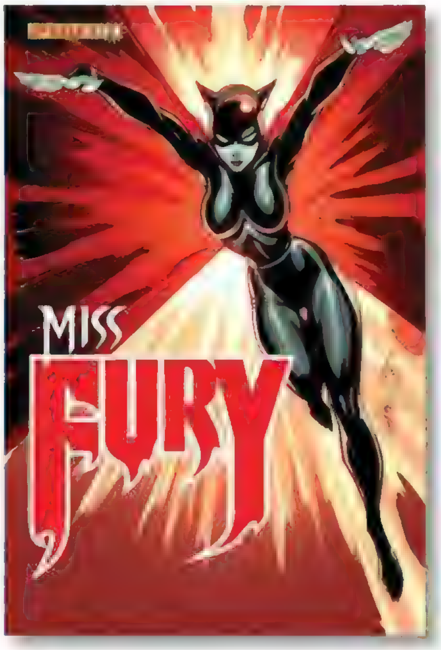
BORN UK

HIGH LOW LIFE

NOW MISS FURY

MORE www.robwilliamscomics.co.uk

> **"She doesn't know if the time travel is real, or just her mind unravelling"**



Comic Heroes: Is this a radical reimagining of the '40s character, or is it actually 'the same girl'? What are the key things about her that everyone should know?

Rob Williams: The basis is the same. She's still Marla Drake, a rich Manhattan socialite from the '40s who dons a pulp heroine costume by night. But then we take the story in a very different direction. Miss Fury stumbles across a Nazi secret agent plot involving a time machine, and when she falls into the thing she finds herself hopping between different eras. One minute she's in 2013, the next a future where the Nazis have won World War 2 using future technology, then her past.

Of course, she questions whether or not any of this is real, or if she's gone insane, as we get to see the pieces that make up the character. Oh yes, and there's a war for her to get involved with and win too.

CH: What's appealing to you about the character? The '40s newspaper strip was, of course, done by a woman; so rare at the time. Did this have an impact on your decision to take *Miss Fury* on?

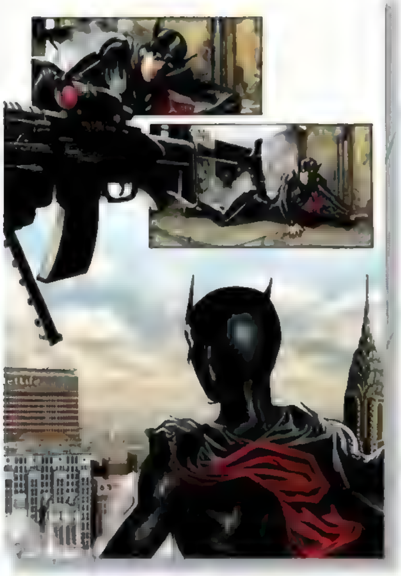
RW: You're right. Miss Fury was perhaps the first 'superhero' to be written by a woman – June Tarpe Mills, in 1941. That puts extra impetus on me to try and create a fully rounded female character, certainly. Hopefully we've done that.

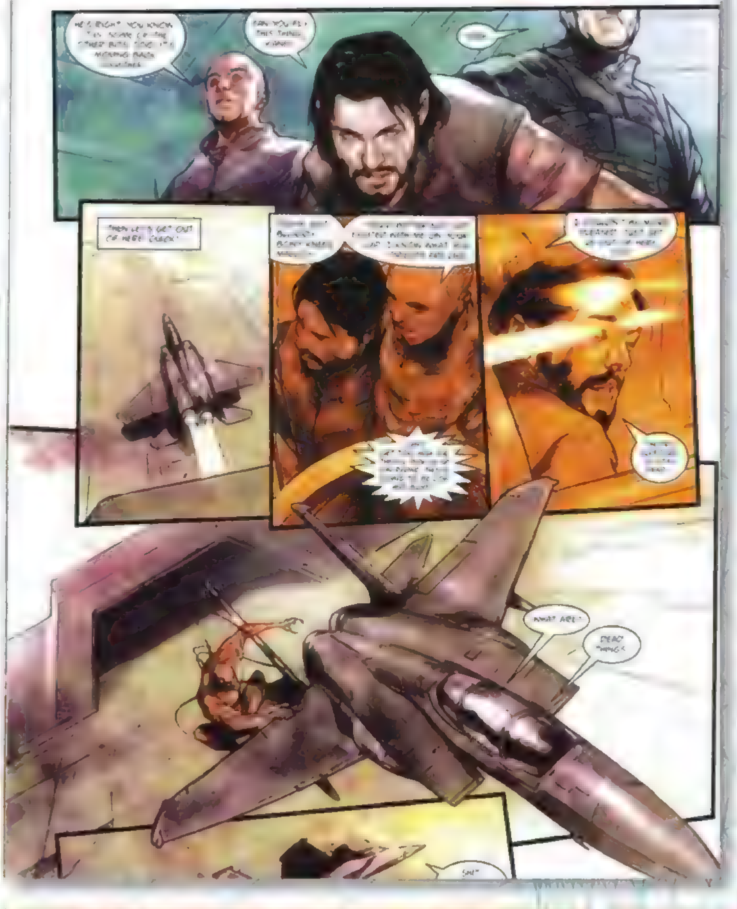
When we first meet her she's pretty immoral and lacks drive. She's a thief out of boredom. But as the story progresses we see why she's that way, and it becomes something of a redemption tale. She has to decide what makes her angry – what she's willing to fight for. She gains a strong sense of right and wrong along the way.

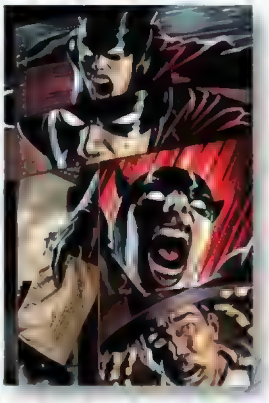
CH: Someone not steeped in comics lore would probably mistake her for Catwoman. Is that a useful comparison, or are there other characters she's actually more similar to? The WW2 hero in the present day/Nazi enemies thing sounds similar to Captain America, for instance...

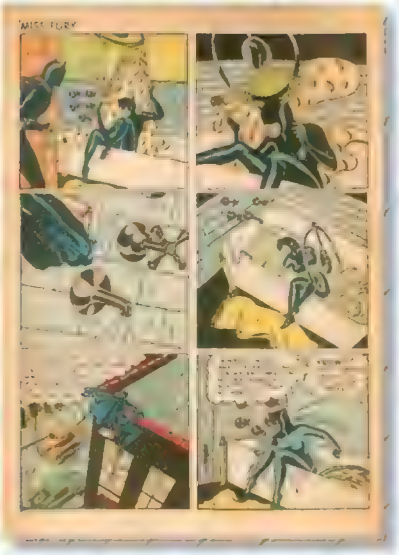
RW: I was aware of that, which is why this isn't just a '1940s character transported to 2013' story. She can't control her time travel experience; she flips constantly between the past, present and future.

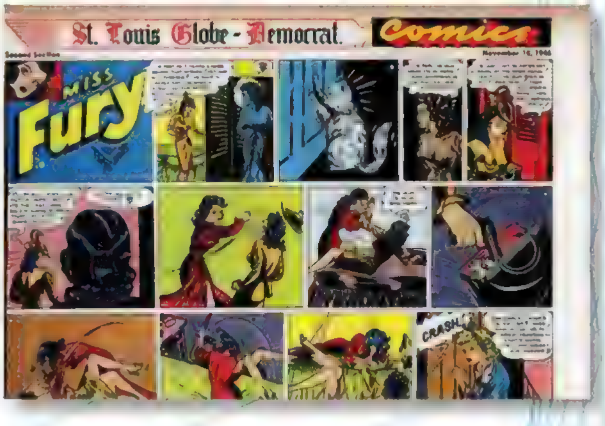
And yes, she's kind of a Catwoman character at the start of our story, I guess.

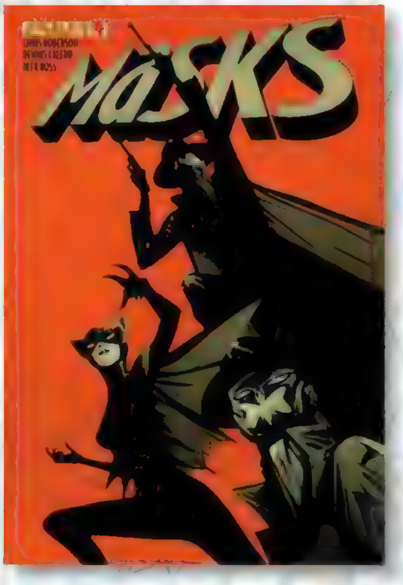












There's certain similarities in the look. But as the story progresses it becomes more *La Femme Nikita*, really, and there's a satirical political edge. This isn't the type of story you'd see in a *Catwoman* comic.

CH: Miss Fury seems pretty violent and vicious; more so than most superheroines. How much is this stuff you've taken from her fairly lurid '40s depiction? And how much are we meant to question her sanity here?
RW: Her sanity is a very large question mark throughout. And not in an 'edgy, violent superhero' cliche manner. This is a woman who had a harsh upbringing from a pathologically cold father, who descended into nihilism and then, during our story, she finds hope – only for that hope to be cruelly taken away. She doesn't know if the time travel is real or just her mind unravelling. Her journey here is to define what her morals are, if any, and to find a sense of purpose in her life.

CH: The original *Miss Fury* supporting cast sounds like a memorable one: Whiffy, the French transvestite smuggler; Erica Von Kampf, with her swastika forehead; Albino Jo, the white-skinned Brazilian Indian, and so on. By setting this strip partially in Miss Fury's future/our present, did you have to abandon these guys?
RW: No, none of Miss Fury's old supporting cast appear here – although I'm beginning to regret not using Erica Von Kampf and her swastika forehead. We wanted to come in fresh, with no continuity. There's a new origin story in issue one and readers will be getting in on the ground floor.

CH: As I understand it, Miss Fury has no superpowers – or, at least, the original didn't. (Later versions, I think, did give her some degree of super-strength.) How much suspension of disbelief do we need here that an adventurous socialite can just put on a costume and then fight gangs of thugs?
RW: I've kept her powers ambiguous for a reason – and, again, it comes back to how solid her sanity is. She has a 'magical' experience in Africa that, she is told, will imbue her with powers. That's never wholly confirmed. She's incredibly fast and agile and good in a fight, superhumanly so at times. But does she 100 per cent have powers? You'll have to wait and see.

CH: And away from *Miss Fury*, what else is taking up your time?
RW: The project I'm probably most excited about right now is *ORDINARY*, a creator-owned book I'll be releasing in 2013. That may be the best thing I've written, I think; I'm really proud of it. A wonderful artist is drawing it too.

I'm enjoying writing *Judge Dredd* quite a lot at the moment, also. The short one-offs allow me to work with a number of disparate artists, including some of my absolute favourites. And I find that a lot of artists would like to have a crack at *Dredd*, and can fit a six or a 10-pager into their schedule. As a result I've got a few artists coming up on *Dredds* of mine who aren't normally associated with *2000 AD*, and are, in fact, better known for their US work.

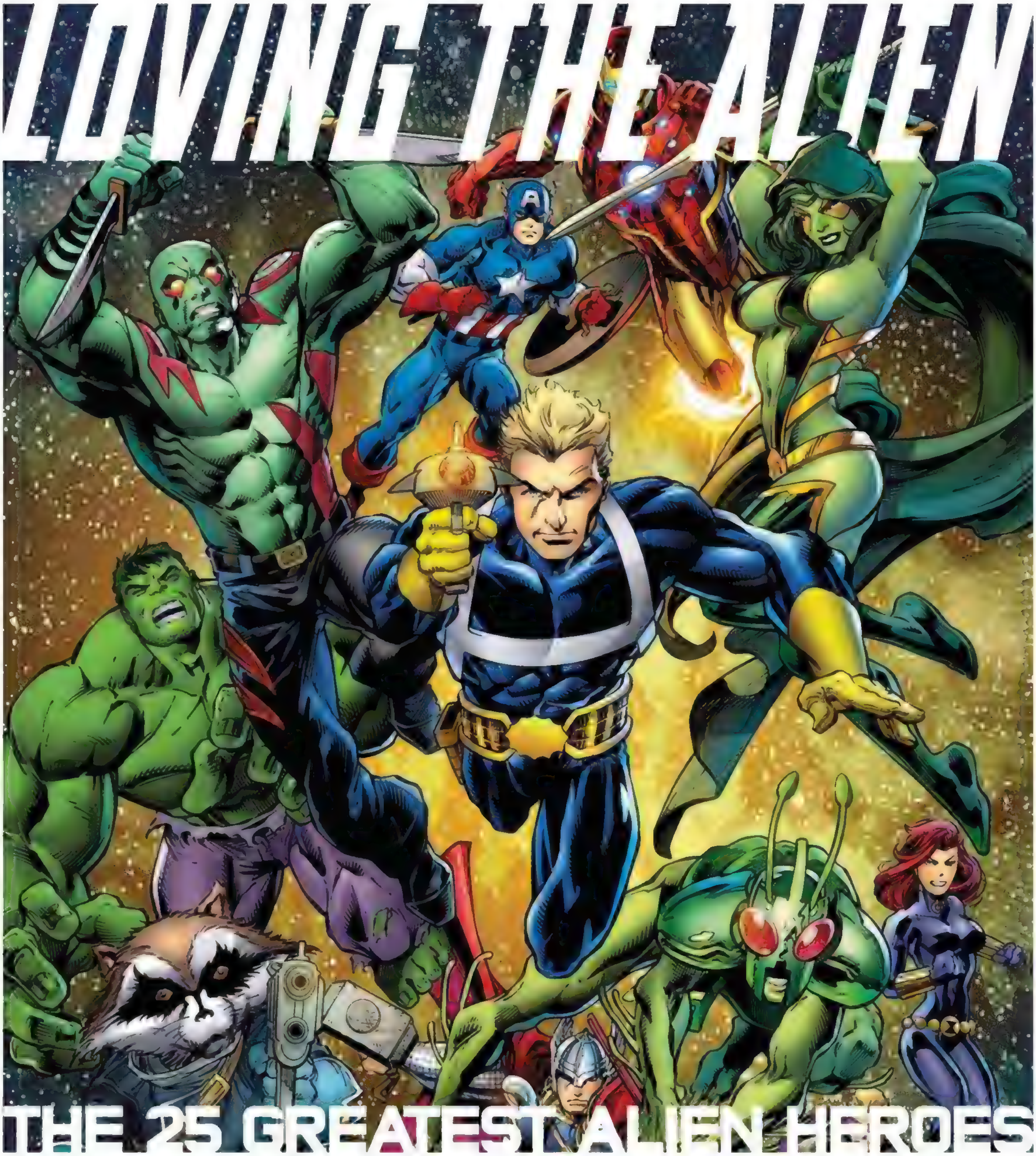
Beyond that, I've got the third series of *The Ten-Seconders* from *2000 AD* too, with the brilliant Edmund Bagwell on art. And I'm doing the odd job for DC and Marvel, with a few other projects coming along that I can't talk about just yet. It's a busy time! CH

Above: Miss Fury might still be wearing her black catsuit from the '40s, but Williams – most famous for *2000 AD* work – promises to drag her, kicking and screaming, into 2013.

The *Miss Fury* ongoing series from Dynamite debuts in April.

LOVING THE ALIEN

THE 25 GREATEST ALIEN HEROES



The very nature of adventure is to take you out of your comfort zone, but these guys embrace it like few others... **By Matt Bielby**

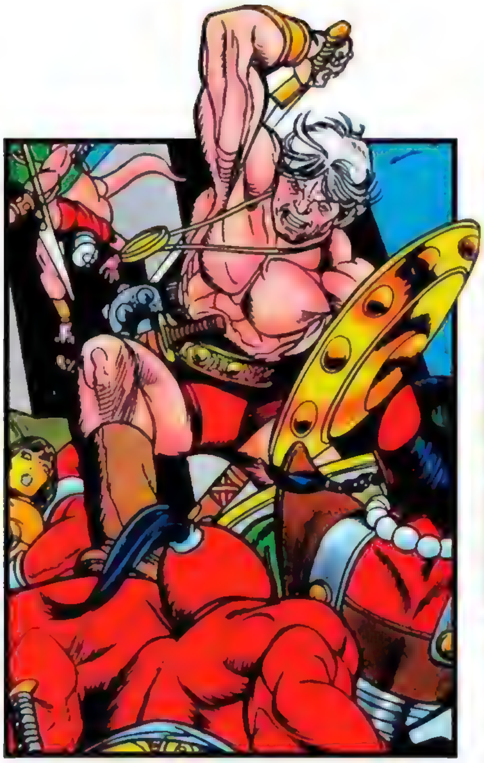
Our heroes come in all shapes and sizes: robots and androids, mutants and augmented humans, and endless rogue members of this hidden race or that, each with powers and looks more bizarre than the last. We embrace them all.

But the first superhero – the guy *Comic Heroes* owes everything to – was something else. He came from the stars, and through science and wishful thinking was gifted with powers far greater than ours. Superman might be as American as apple pie, constantly draped in the flag, but he's also Kryptonian – as alien as it gets. And at one level that means he'll never fit in, never feel quite comfortable. We, of course, would have it no other way.

Superheroes without weaknesses would be tedious, of course – DC/National gave us kryptonite to solve that little problem. But Stan Lee had another idea: heap angst upon our heroes, have them forever worrying about their damaged hearts, lost loves, or the casual cruelties of the popular kids. All the best heroes feel in some way rejected by the world they fight to protect, but when our hero is from *elsewhere*, not one of us in any respect, this cuts especially deep. Welcome, then, to our countdown of the greatest alien heroes – men from the planets who came to help out, or those from our world who journeyed far to fight the good fight.

We've been strict in our choices: no Namor or Inhumans, who only occasionally visit our world, and who are, in any event, Earth creatures of a sort. No Tarzan or Ka-Zar – the alien worlds they fight for are too close to home. The likes of Green Lantern only just scrape in: yes, he's powered by space-tech, but he spends most of his time right here.

These guys, however, really are Strangers in a Strange Land, trapped in a world they never made...



25

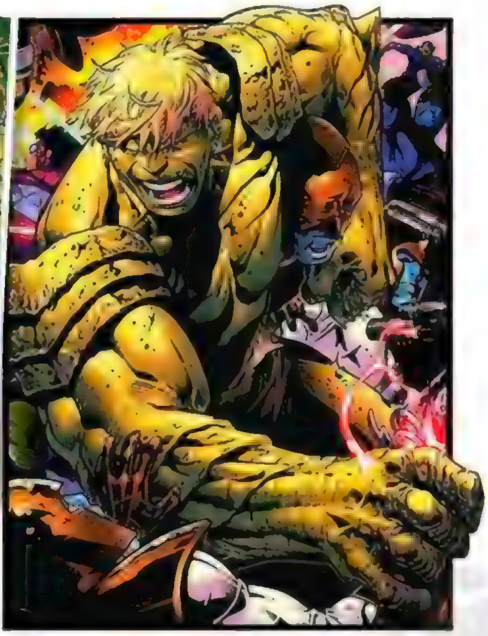
GULLIVAR JONES

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
CREATURES ON THE LOOSE
THE MONSTER AND THE MAIDEN!

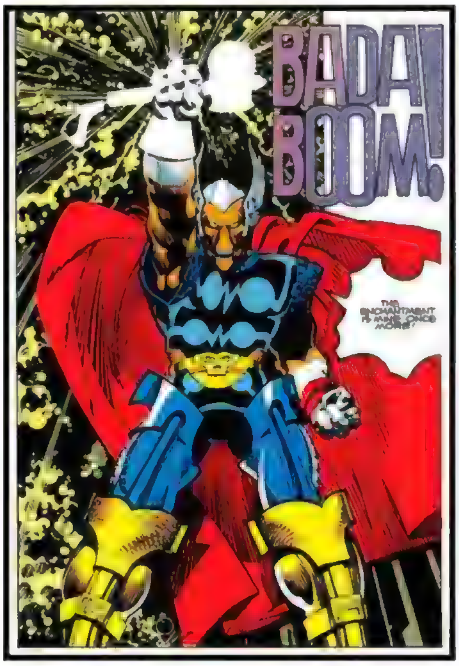
Post-*Conan*, barbarians were hot, so amongst all the Thongors and Kulls came a more sci-fi take on the theme: *Gullivar Jones, Warrior of Mars*. Taken from the last, best-known novel by Edwin Lester Arnold (*Lieutenant Gullivar Jones: His Vacation*, 1905) the new strip appeared in six issues of *Creatures On The Loose*, and told of a young Vietnam vet whisked to a fantasy playground where he has superpowers and all things seem possible. Some may have called foul, seeing too obvious parallels with Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom series – the John Carter stories that begin with *A Princess Of Mars* – but Gullivar Jones was actually written six years *earlier*, and was almost certainly an influence on Burroughs. As with Barsoom, a burly American military officer magically arrives on a savage, beautiful Mars populated by monsters and beautiful maidens and docile, decadent cities seemingly doomed through apathy and in desperate need of an outsider's proactive spunk; naturally, Gullivar has adventures there. Less proactive and more vulnerable than the highly capable Carter, he's never caught the public imagination in the same way – still, as drawn by Gil Kane in particular, this was a potent hero, and his supporting cast of birdmen, giant monsters, red-skinned oppressors and bikini-clad princesses showed real, brief potential.

24

HULKLING



The witty, sly *Young Avengers* series of the mid-Noughties had great fun upsetting expectations, from the most pressing – how could a team of teenage copies of key Marvel heroes be anything *but* shite? – to smart takes on sexuality that immediately made most comics look like they're living in the dark ages. Hulkling's super-strong and green, but he's a shapeshifter too – since he's not gamma-powered like his namesake, we early on start to suspect that he might be a Skrull, but that only turns out to be half true, for his father was actually the Kree warrior Captain Mar-Vell. Initially intended by writer/creator Allan Heinberg to be a girl using shapeshifting powers to pose as a boy, a later rethink saw him explicitly male – and in a gay relationship with Asgardian/Wiccan, a Thor-themed fellow New Avenger. Though brought up on Earth, Hulkling's background is as alien as it gets – and he soon becomes caught in a tug-of-war between Skrull and Kree. Though Hulkling's sexuality became the big talking point, his über-outsider status is clearly built on more than just that. It's to the guy's credit that he comes across as well adjusted as he does, quite frankly…

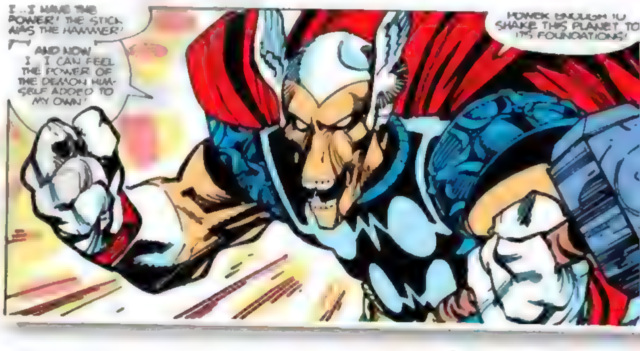

BADA BOOM!
THE ENCHANTMENT IS MINE ONCE MORE!

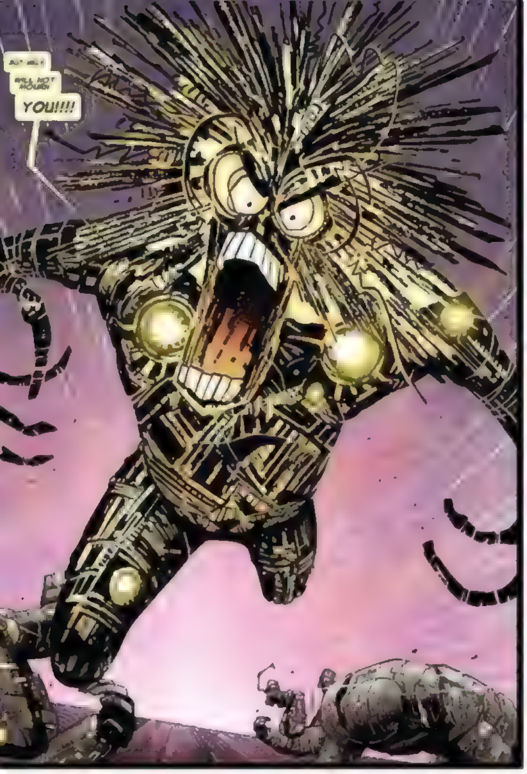
23

BETA RAY BILL

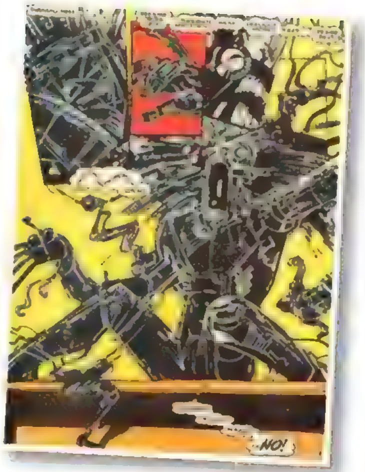
the mighty THOR

With his silly name and horse-skull face, this Thor-powered alien could have been one of Marvel's biggest embarrassments; that he was anything but is purely down to the skill of writer/artist Walt Simonson, the inspiration coming early during what turned out to be a career-best turn on *Thor*. Under Simonson, Bill quickly developed beyond his expectation-twisting debut – the seeming monster, his visage a compelling mixture of beauty and death, who turns out to be a hero – to become an appealing everyman type, albeit one who gets to lift Mjolnir, earns his own similarly powered hammer, Stormbringer, romances Sif, and becomes an important Marvel hero for a time. Though he still shows up – in 2010's *The Thanos Imperative* storyline, for instance – he's certainly faded somewhat from his '80s heyday; a real shame, for there's more potential here than in most of comics' cosmic heroes. His look is striking indeed, after all, and his combination of just-a-regular-guy qualities with alien unknowability is an intriguing one.


I...I HAVE THE POWER! THE STICK WAS THE HAMMER!
AND NOW I... I CAN FEEL THE POWER OF THE DEMON HIM-SELF ADDED TO MY OWN!
POWER ENOUGH TO SHAKE THIS PLANET TO ITS FOUNDATIONS!



22 WARLOCK

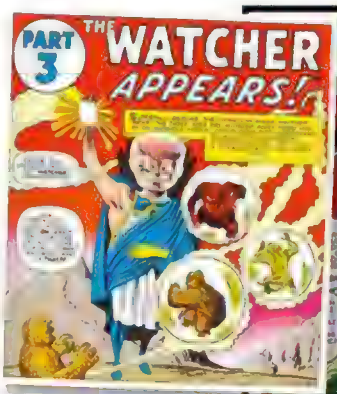


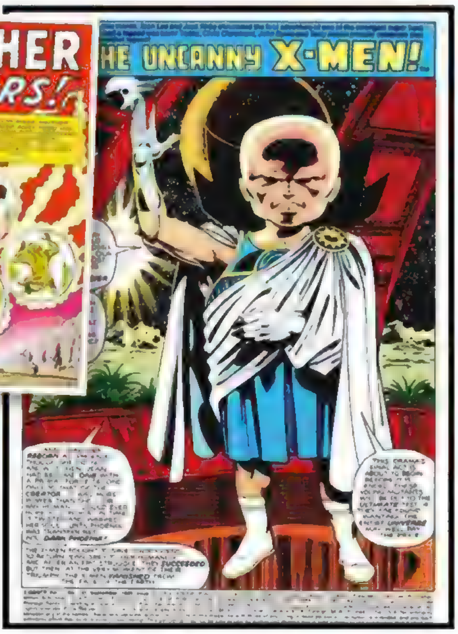
This Warlock – not to be confused with Marvel's other, more famous one – was the great original creation of the brief, unexpected Chris Claremont/Bill Sienkiewicz years on the *New Mutants*, the X-Men's spin-off youth team of the '80s, whose superheroes-at-school adventures took a darker, weirder twist with the arrival of the experimental, scratchy Sienkiewicz from #18.

Sienkiewicz started as he meant to go on, introducing this young alien-cyborg escapee from the parasitical, 'techno-organic' Technarchy species in his first issue. Only a mutant in that he seemed to show more compassion than others of his type, he was a prince of his people, running from his dangerous, powerful father and slowly learning how *most* lifeforms do things (ie without draining other creatures of their 'lifeglow'). Warlock's shape was black and constantly shifting, making him very hard for anyone but the mercurial Sienkiewicz to draw – though others, notably Alan Davis, have had a good go – and following his apparent death a resurrected version would team up with Excalibur, hang out with a mutant girl called Hope (also not the famous one), attempt to rebuild his species in a more benevolent form and return to Earth to take part in the 2010 crossover event, *Necrosha*. He's one of the most non-human alien creations in all of Marvel.

21 THE WATCHER

STRANGE TALES
ENTER THE WATCHER!

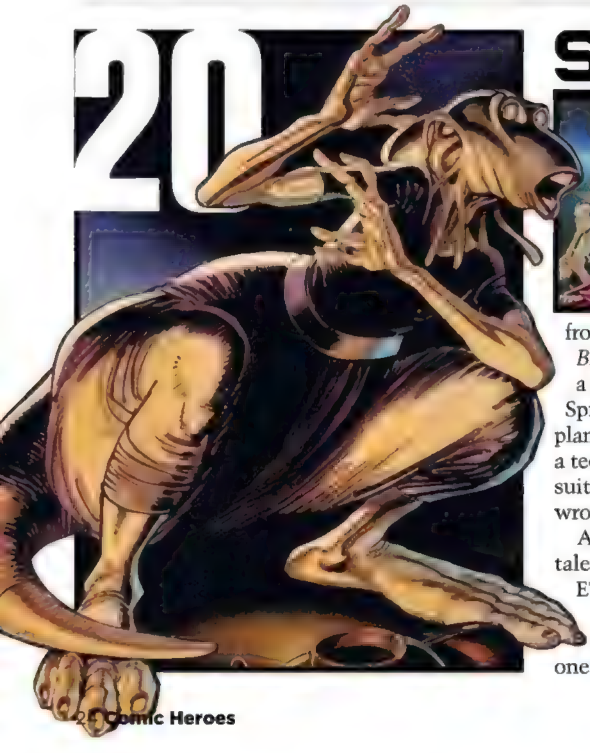


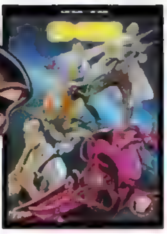

THE UNCANNY X-MEN!

Is there a more lonely fellow than this guy, hanging out on Earth's moon, observing everything we do, sworn not to interfere? A big, bald alien with the looks and manner of an ancient Greek philosopher, he's our local rep from perhaps the oldest species in the universe, cosmic aliens sworn to sit on their hands no matter what goes down – a rule our guy, who we learn to call Uatu, seems to break endlessly, notably during the first appearance of Galactus (*Fantastic Four* #48-50), when he attempts to hide Earth from the Silver Surfer, then boosts the Human Torch's powers and sends him on a mission to stop the hungry god. Other times he's less proactive, but still affects events radically – if only by telling everyone what's going on, and hinting at solutions.

Though he's hosted his own series – notably the science fiction parables dubbed *Tales Of The Watcher* in the Silver Surfer's original series – we've learned little about Uatu or his people in the 50 years he's been a Marvel Universe fixture, partly because the species' vague-but-near-omnipotent powers and ill-thought-through non-interference principles wouldn't stand up to prolonged scrutiny, but mostly because he was only ever really conceived of as a narrative device, a narrator or one-man Greek chorus. Still, the key image – he's a Jack Kirby creation, after all – is a strong one: this kindly demigod, the man in the moon, up above the clouds and following our every move.

20 SKIZZ

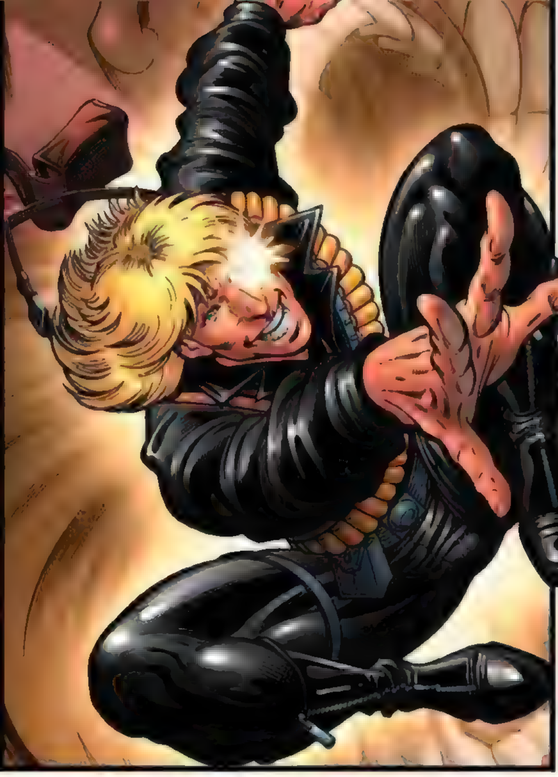




SCROTNIG NEW THRILL BEGINS THIS PROG!
2000 AD
18p
JUDGE DREDD
THIS IS SKIZZ

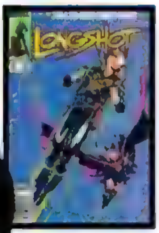
So many *2000 AD* strips have been smart spins on mainstream hit movies and such – *MACH 1* as *The Six Million Dollar Man* and so on – and so it was with *Skizz*, *ET* comes to Birmingham in one of Alan Moore's most important contribs to the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. Stitching major elements from Alan Bleasdale's TV series *The Boys From the Blackstuff* – which, like *ET*, had appeared in 1982, a year before Skizz – it was a grittier take on Spielberg's basic cute, peaceful alien lost on a hell-planet (Earth), with the young boy helper replaced by a teenage girl, a more obvious, Nazi-esque villain and suitably dark, scratchy art by Jim Baikie, who later wrote and drew two sequels.

After more than 50 *Future Shocks* and *Time Twisters* – *2000 AD*'s self-contained one-off tales – this was Moore's first series for the comic, and conceived from the start as ET-with-the-serial-numbers-filed-off; keen to put as much distance between the series and its key inspiration, Moore apparently avoided seeing the film at all, but later regretted all the blatant Bleasdale steals. A bit of a Frankenstein's monster of a strip, then, but it remains one with heart and power – and Skizz's space-kangaroo design was inspired.



19

LONGSHOT



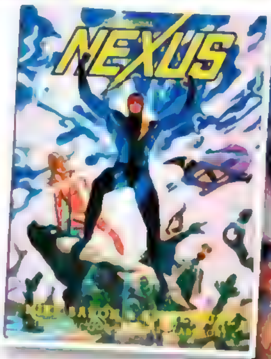
A MAN WITHOUT A PAST

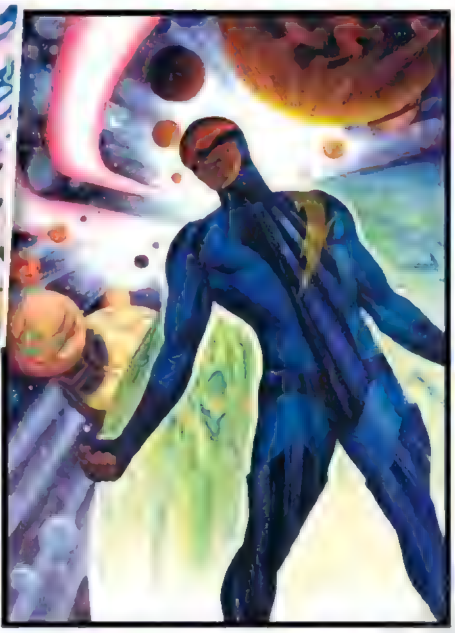
As with Warlock, a number of alien escapees would hang with the X-Men for a time, but the none-more-'80s Longshot is about the most notable. A lean, handsome blond chap from another dimension – boasting one glowing eye, three fingers (plus thumb) to each hand, and the most outrageous Limahl-meets-Flock-of-Seagulls hairdo – he was a cheery natured acrobat-rebel who relied on good luck powers for his survival; a bit of a sex god too, with the chicks falling for him an apparently designed-in aspect of his genetic make-up.

Created by Ann Nocenti and a spectacular new artist called Arthur Adams, he debuted in his own miniseries – where he's shown to be a genetically engineered action TV show star from the 'Mojoverse', a dimension dominated by gladiatorial entertainment spectaculars – and later hung with the X-Men and assorted spin-off teams on-and-off for years, losing his memory numerous times, returning to lead failed rebellions against old boss Mojo, and getting Dazzler up the duff at one point. Perhaps Longshot's most enduring, most unwelcome contribution to the world of comics, however, was his look: the black *Star Trek: TNG*-style jumpsuit, the multiple belts and equipment pouches, the glowing eye, the terrible hair. Add more muscles and guns, and you had the core '90s, Image-influenced look right there.

18

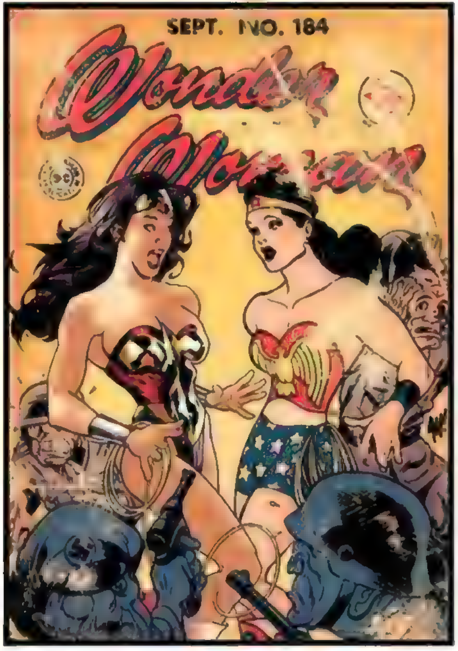
NEXUS





Set 500 years in the future, with a protagonist who *looks* like a superhero, *Nexus* is actually a peculiarly genre-hopping strip, mixing space politics and *Babylon 5*-style mysteries about the secret running of the universe with a bloodthirsty hero-as-reluctant-assassin storyline front-and-centre. Created by writer Mike Baron and penciller Steve Rude in 1981, it was one of the lead titles in the independent comic boom of the time, running through an 80-issue main series and a bunch of subsequent miniseries, and taking bizarrely named hero Horatio Hellpop from reluctant killer of galactic mass murderers, here working in the service of mysterious alien entity The Merk, to boss of a bizarre world of misfits and rebels.

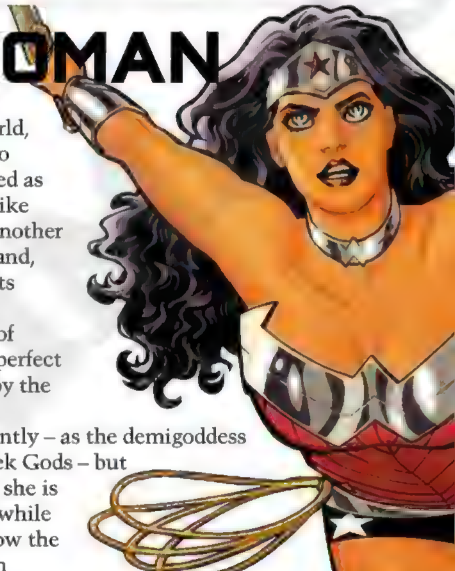
In time we learn that Horatio is the son of a dictatorial communist general who blew up an entire planet and its population rather than lose power – naturally, The Merk would soon send Nexus to eliminate the nasty General Hellpop – while the young Horatio's life is dominated by two (seemingly) imaginary friends, neither of whom is quite what they seem. Though he never visits Earth, Nexus remains an outsider, battered and manipulated by forces he can barely comprehend – at least at first – and only feeling at home, eventually, in a new society he helps to create. This is bold, intriguing stuff – one of comics' great sci-fi sagas.



17

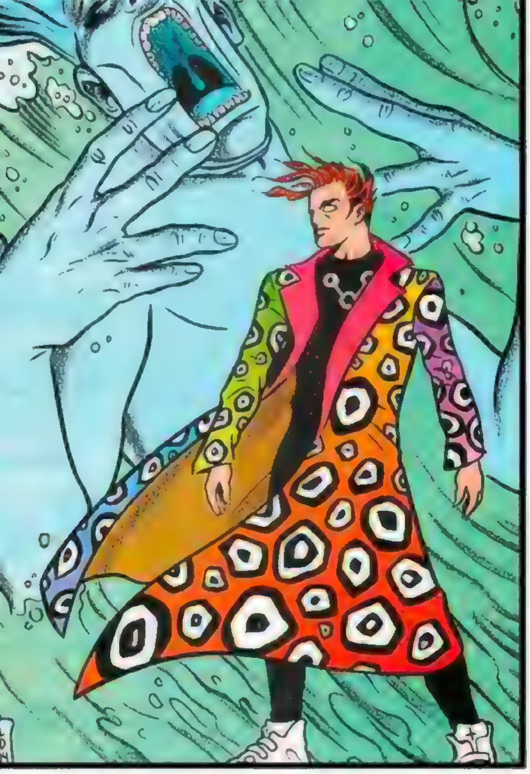
WONDER WOMAN

Wonder Woman



The Amazon princess – one of the most recognised fictional characters in the world, and the most important female superhero ever created – is only sporadically depicted as an alien, but that's what she is at heart: like Superman, she's a lone emissary from another world (this one an all-female hidden island, currently known as Themyscira, with its inhabitants – at least until the New 52 – depicted as the reincarnated souls of women killed by men, now inhabiting perfect bodies shaped from clay and given life by the Olympian goddesses).

These days Diana is explained differently – as the demigoddess daughter of an Amazon queen and Zeus, king of the Greek Gods – but it hardly makes her less strange; a princess of her people, she is also the Amazon's ambassador to the world of men, and while she fights for us (and has, in time, come to understand how the outside world works) she's separated from regular folks in numerous ways too. Half bringer of peace – "make a hawk a dove, stop a war with love," as the '70s TV theme had it – she's also just about the fiercest, most bloodthirsty warrior in the entire DC universe. Wonder Woman may be awe-inspiring, may be on our side – but it would be the brave, foolish man who could claim to understand her.



16

SHADE THE CHANGING MAN

"Who, or what, is The Changing Man?" read the teaser ads to Steve Ditko's new 1977 superhero series, the adventures of an innocent, wrongly accused fugitive from the extra-dimensional planet of Meta. For a while it was a moot point whether he existed in the regular DC universe or somewhere else, while his only obvious power – protecting himself with a force field and projecting a frighteningly huge and warped image of his body to the outside world, both through a stolen 'M-vest' – seemed to have little great potential.

Following the comic's cancellation after eight issues – part of a huge DC contraction of the time – Shade, still on the run, would hang with the Suicide Squad, before a Peter Milligan-inspired reinvention transformed him into an early Vertigo mainstay. This Rac Shade was now a lovestruck poet, his 'Madness-Vest' a reality warping device, and his mission being to stem a growing tide of insanity. As the series progressed, Shade would change bodies – he was a woman for a while – as the battle to save both himself and the Earth constantly tottered on the edge of disaster.

Following the series' conclusion with #70, later depictions of Shade have mixed both incarnations with gay abandon. Shade has always been a bizarre strip, but the bafflement our alien hero exhibits is about as realistic a depiction of the 'Stranger In a Strange Land' predicament as comics have ever displayed.

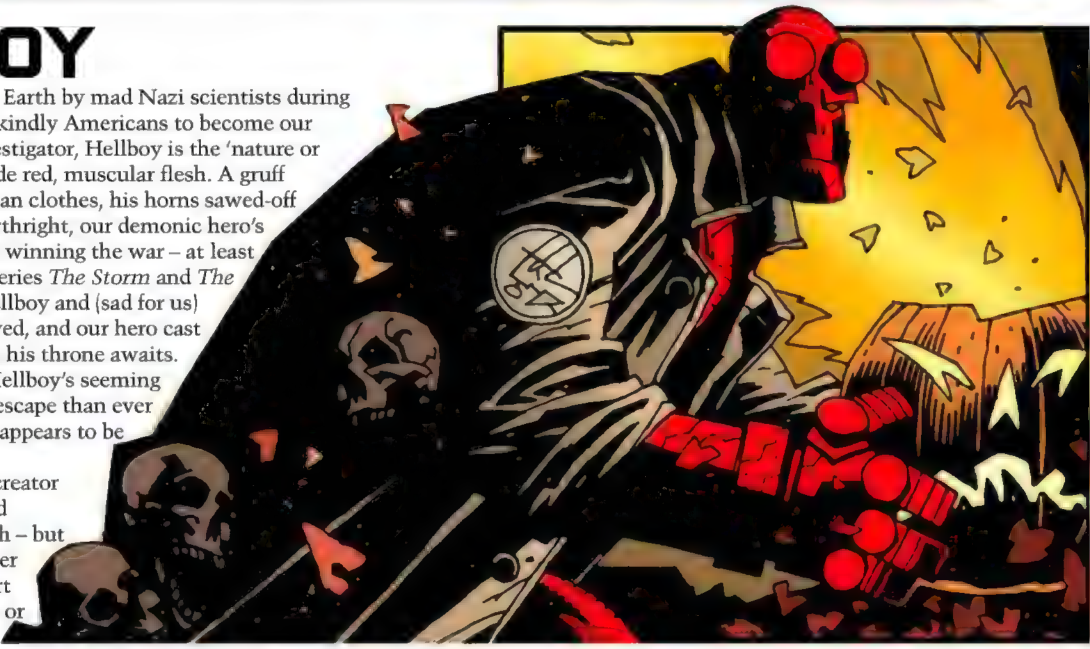
15

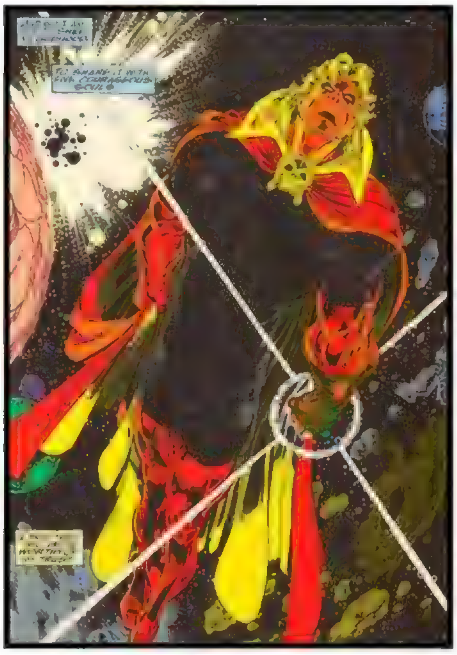
HELLBOY

HELLBOY
THE CROOKED MAN

A demon baby brought to Earth by mad Nazi scientists during WW2, but brought up by kindly Americans to become our greatest supernatural investigator, Hellboy is the 'nature or nurture?' conundrum made red, muscular flesh. A gruff creature of the pit in human clothes, his horns sawed-off short in rejection of his birthright, our demonic hero's 'nice guy' side seems to be winning the war – at least until events of twin miniseries *The Storm* and *The Fury*, which leave both Hellboy and (sad for us) the bulk of the UK destroyed, and our hero cast into the pit where he finds his throne awaits. Still a good guy at heart, Hellboy's seeming fate would look harder to escape than ever – though he certainly still appears to be doing his level best to avoid it.

Most of Hellboy's adventures have been creator Mike Mignola's excuse to explore real-world folklore – from Baba Yaga to Arthurian myth – but at its heart is the story of a hero from another world, built to be bad but following his heart and his nurturing instead. Whether he wins or not, it's fascinating watching the conflict.





14

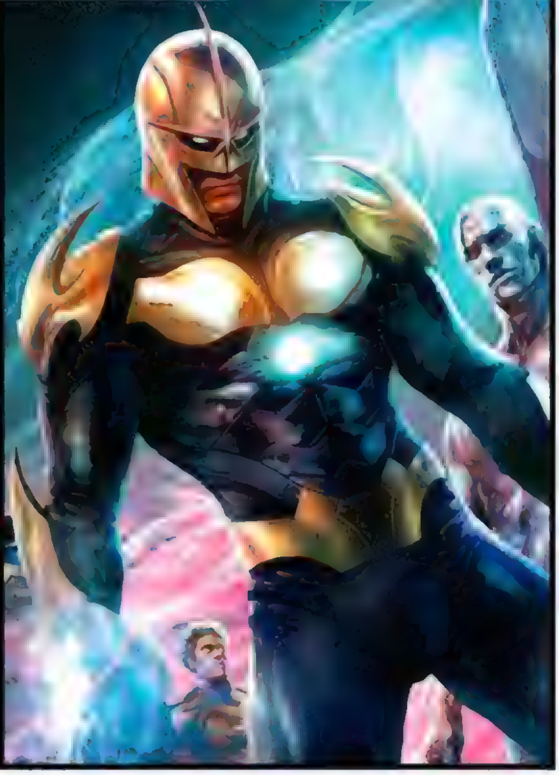
ADAM WARLOCK

ESSENTIAL
WARLOCK

Though created – as a character described only as 'Him' – by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby for a 1967 issue of *Fantastic Four*, it was two years later, and following an extensive *Jesus Christ Superstar*-meets-*Shazam!* influenced revamp by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane, that the golden, godlike superhero Adam Warlock really started to take flight, a space Messiah fighting to save a Counter-Earth (invisible from us on the other side of the sun) from a Satan-esque Man-Beast. It was a tale with punch, but the character really started to soar when Jim Starlin – fresh from *Captain Marvel* – took control in 1975, for an extended storyline now referred to as 'The Magus Saga'.

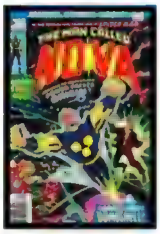
As Him, Warlock was an artificial human created by mad scientists, who went rogue, fought Thor, and was reinvented by the High Evolutionary to battle the Man-Beast. The initial Starlin adventures see him opposing an evil religious galactic empire ruled over – it turns out – by a mad version of himself from the far future, while, following a 1991 revival, he's been pretty much a fixture of Cosmic Marvel, often thwarting the mad, death-worshipping Titan, Thanos, in his attempts to gather the powerful, dangerous 'Soul Gems'.

It's the religious trapping, imagery and parallels forced upon Adam Warlock that make him such a fascinating creation: this is our Saviour in red and gold lycra, come to Earth to keep us safe – though, admittedly, in rather more two-fisted a fashion than was ever told of in the New Testament.



13

THE MAN CALLED NOVA



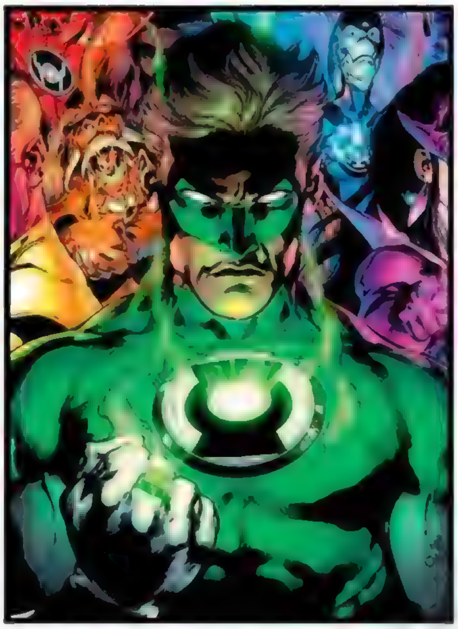
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
35¢
THE MAN CALLED NOVA
SPIDER-MAN

Whenever Marvel and DC's characters meet in those now-rare crossovers, we see the parallels immediately: Batman naturally fights Captain America, Hawkeye goes up against Green Arrow and so on. Often the pairings are coincidence, but sometimes a character was deliberately created to replicate something the other side has – and so it was with Nova, a 1976 Marv Wolfman/Len Wein/John Romita/John Buscema concoction that welded Green Lantern's regular-guy-becomes-member-of-superpowered-space-police premise with a direct reprise of the early *Spider-Man* stories. Richard Ryder was a regular working class student chosen at random by a dying Nova Centurion from the planet Xandar; now he has to desperately learn how to use his new powers (strength, toughness, flying around head-first like an out-of-control cannonball) to battle space pirates, regular Earth supervillains and Skrulls.

The original series lasted 25 issues, but *Nova* has been revived many times since, in *New Warriors*, crossovers like *Annihilation*, and now in a fresh ongoing reviewed elsewhere this issue. Though the early Nova stories took place on Earth, later tales have all been about throwing him, sink or swim, into deep space to see how he gets on there.

12

GREEN LANTERN



Green Lantern is one of the most enduring DC superheroes and – as he has all space as his backdrop – one of those with the greatest potential too. There have been plenty of GLs over the years – generally Earthmen of differing degrees of obvious suitability – gifted by a power ring (and the battery needed to charge it, inexplicably shaped like an old railway lantern) with incredible superpowers.

For the original Golden Age version – a guy called Alan Scott, invented by the (generally uncredited) Batman co-creator Bill Finger and artist Martin Nodell for a 1940 issue of *All-American Comics* – the power ring was basically magic, but all GLs since the 1959 reinvention at the start of the Silver Age have been based in a sort of fantasy science. Little blue dwarves called the Guardians of the Universe have invented the ring as a tool and/or weapon, and given it to suitable types from across space, each with their own sector to patrol and keep safe. Our guy – traditionally a hot-shot test pilot called Hal Jordan, but there have been four or five others prominent – can fly with it, breathe in space, and build incredible 'solid energy' constructs; willpower and imagination seem to be the main limiting factors dictating exactly what you can or can't do.

Though many Green Lantern adventures take place on Earth, there's almost always a cosmic aspect – and most of the more memorable are out amongst the stars, where Jordan (or whoever) battles alongside bizarre aliens, with fish-heads or multiple limbs, against the worst and weirdest the universe has to throw at them.

40¢
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
FABULOUS 1ST ISSUE!
ARRIVAL!

11

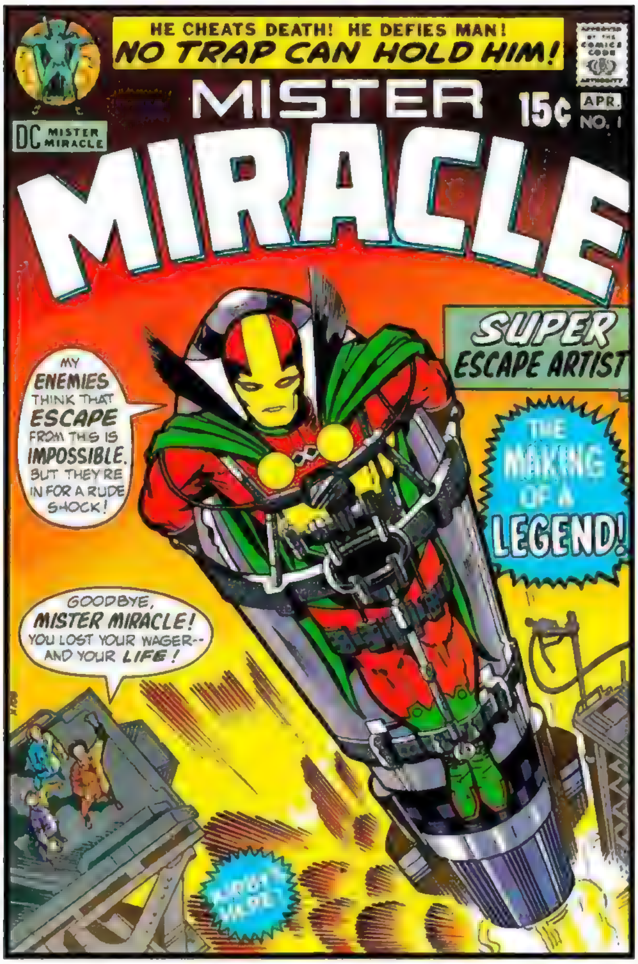
ROM: SPACEKNIGHT

NEW!
ELECTRONIC
ACTION TOY!
ROM
PARKER BROTHERS

Based on a minor Parker Brothers/Hasbro toy – its main gimmick, the pinky-red LED lights that glowed in its head instead of eyes – this licensed strip was a surprisingly enduring '80s hit, telling of crusaders from a far planet (alien volunteers turned into cyborg warriors) coming to Earth to help battle an invasion of gruesome, pink shape-changing Dire Wraiths: part Skrull, part Giger-alien, all nasty.

Legal issues have prevented a full revival thus far, but rumours are growing amongst the '80s children that make up much of comic fandom (and its creative community too, of course), fires rekindled by his apparent tiny cameo in the current *Age Of Ultron* crossover. After all, Hasbro contributed virtually nothing to the *Rom* mythology save the toy's clunky, silver look, and it would be a shame for Marvel to waste all that good '80s invention forever. (You can tell how much current creators love *Rom*: they stole the entire Dire Wraith premise wholesale for the recent *Secret Invasion* crossover.)

Though the comic ended with Rom returning to human form and helping repopulate his dead home world – nice work if you can get it – most Spaceknights were not so lucky, and part of the power of Rom was to do with the sacrifice inherent in the idea of willingly surrendering yourself in this fashion, your organs and brain now transplanted into a biped tank to serve the greater good. With luck, Rom will rise again.


HE CHEATS DEATH! HE DEFIES MAN!
NO TRAP CAN HOLD HIM!
DC MISTER MIRACLE
MISTER MIRACLE
15¢
APR.
NO. 1
SUPER ESCAPE ARTIST
THE MAKING OF A LEGEND!
MY ENEMIES THINK THAT ESCAPE FROM THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE. BUT THEY'RE IN FOR A RUDE SHOCK!
GOODBYE, MISTER MIRACLE! YOU LOST YOUR WAGER-- AND YOUR LIFE!

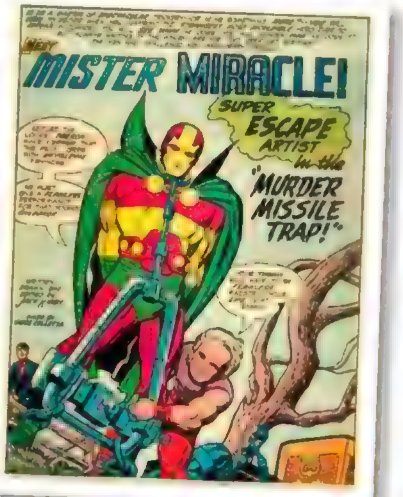
10

MR MIRACLE

Jack Kirby's so-called 'Fourth World' saga – the ambitious space epic he created at DC in the early '70s, comprising interlocked books *The New Gods*, *The Forever People*, *Mister Miracle* and (to a degree) Superman's pal Jimmy Olsen – was heaving with alien heroes come to Earth (we could easily have picked the central figure of Orion for this list, for instance, or perhaps Mark Moonrider of The Forever People), but super-escape artist Mister Miracle is surely the epic's purest example of the type.

While the other titles were canned early – to Kirby's eternal heartbreak – with #11, *Mister Miracle* lasted another seven issues, and has been revived a few times since. Partly inspired by Jim Steranko's career as an illusionist, Scott Free was the good-guy son of Highfather of New Genesis, swapped as a child with evil Darkseid of Apokolips' kid Orion in a Shakespearean peace treaty. Brought up in one of the ill-named Granny Goodness' 'Terror Orphanages', he would eventually realise his provenance and flee to Earth, earning a living as a circus escape artist while forever staying only one step ahead of Darkseid's pursuing hordes.

Much of the power of Kirby's creations was in the straight-to-the-gut nature of the predicaments he put his people in, and the so-obvious tools he gave them to finish the job. Many issues of *Mister Miracle* showed Scott Free, in his circus outfit, bound to some impossible-to-escape contraption, facing certain death – a stranger to our world, yet he cheated the reaper constantly, wriggling out of captivity (both literally and metaphorically) again and again.

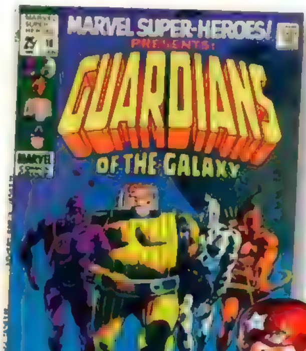

MISTER MIRACLE!
SUPER ESCAPE ARTIST in the "MURDER MISSILE TRAP!"

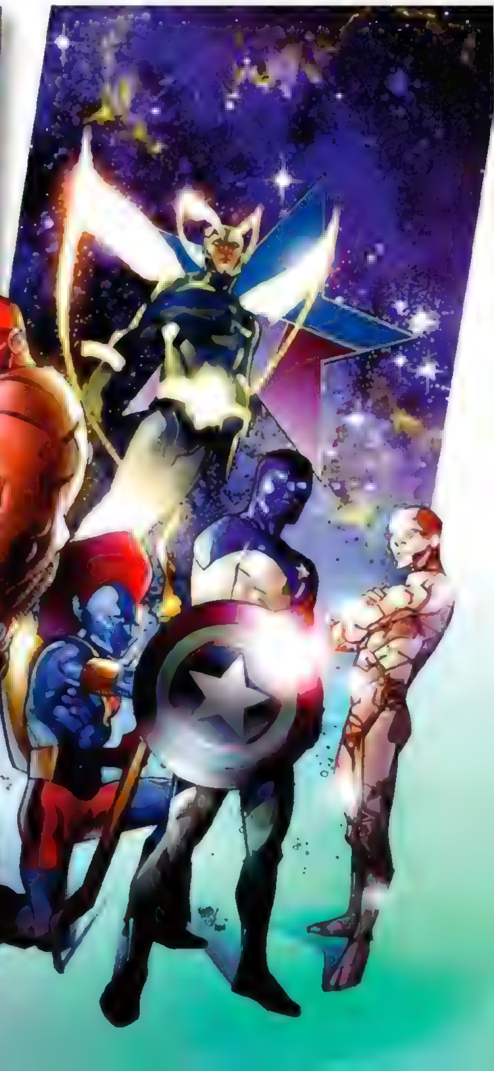
9

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

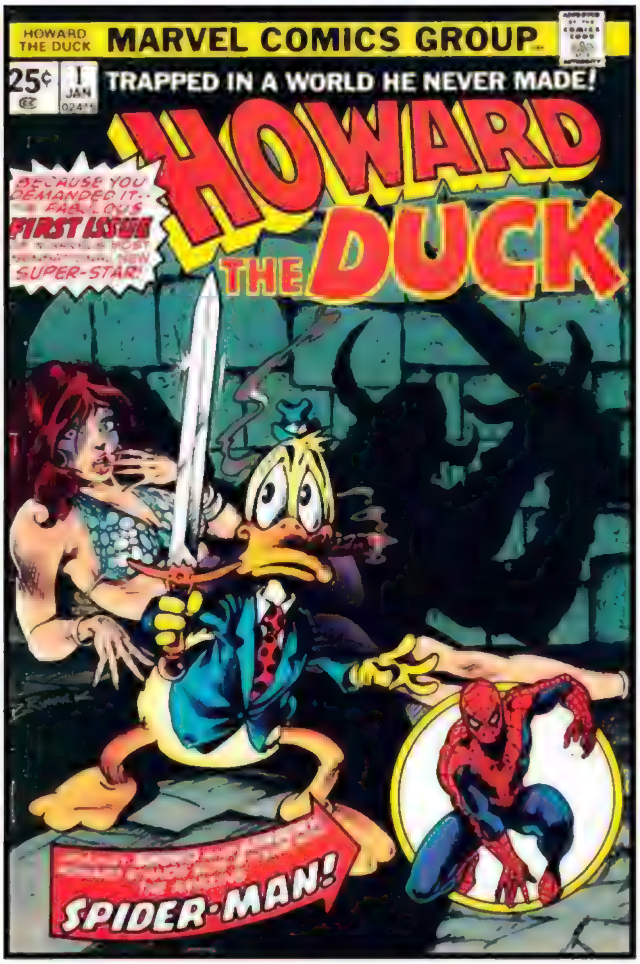
The 1969 Guardians of the Galaxy, sporadically prominent in '70s Marvel books, were far-future freedom fighters on the run; the modern incarnation are more like space-Avengers, inspired by the originals but basically a collection of stray Cosmic Marvel types, picking fights and doing good. There's Star-Lord, everyman leader on the lam from his destiny as an alien princeling; there's Jim Starlin's Gamora, adopted daughter of Thanos; and there's Rocket Raccoon, the Bill Mantlo/Keith Giffen joke hero (from a society of genetically modified anthropomorphic animal guardians of a deep space colony for the mentally ill, no less), apparently inspired by a mishearing of The Beatles song 'Rocky Raccoon'.

The Guardians have a new film due next year, hence their rise from mid-range players in such recent Cosmic crossovers as *Annihilation: Conquest* and *War Of Kings* to big-name stars of a new ongoing series by one of Marvel's biggest-name creative teams. The potential is clear, but exactly what the story the Guardians have to share is – so far – not so obvious. Still, Peter 'Star-Lord' Quill is a classic reluctant hero type, plucked from an ordinary life on Earth to fulfil an as-yet-unclear space destiny, and in the likes of tree-man Groot and that (charmlessly aggressive) tough-talking cutie Rocket, the Chewbaccas are certainly in place to balance with his Luke.


MARVEL SUPER-HEROES! PRESENTS:
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY


HOWARD THE DUCK
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
25¢
1
JAN
TRAPPED IN A WORLD HE NEVER MADE!
HOWARD THE DUCK
BECAUSE YOU DEMANDED IT... FAB-U-LOUS FIRST ISSUE
NEW SUPER-STAR!
SPIDER-MAN!

8

HOWARD THE DUCK

One of the most out-there of all Marvel's experimental '70s creations, Howard the Duck looked like a classic anthropomorphic 'funny animal' comic character – Donald Duck with the ill-tempered, wise-cracking, cigar-chewing personality of Groucho Marx; Disney, of course, threatened to sue – but was explained as an alien from a parallel Earth of some sort. Howard has no special powers or abilities, and feels a victim of events in a cruel, meaningless universe. Mostly he wants to be left alone, and adventures – featuring villains from the wackier side of the Marvel Universe, Doctor Bong being prominent – were forced upon him rather; regular Marvel heroes would often show up too, notably Man-Thing and The Defenders, usually to play straight man to the gag-a-minute Howard.

The invention of a young Steve Gerber, Howard seemed incredibly vital and important for a brief period – what other strip of the time took as its subject nothing less than *the Human Condition itself*? – and offered an exciting new spin on the regular Marvel trope of alienated heroes, outsiders looking in, that chimed well with a rebellious college-age audience. But though he still crops up (notably in 2001, when Gerber returned to the character for a more blatantly adult Marvel Max series), Howard was very much a creation of a certain moment in time, and no other creator has seemed to know quite what to do with him. Still, for the first 25 issues or so this was a total triumph – this alien duck, 'trapped in a world he never made', who happened to be more human than most of us.

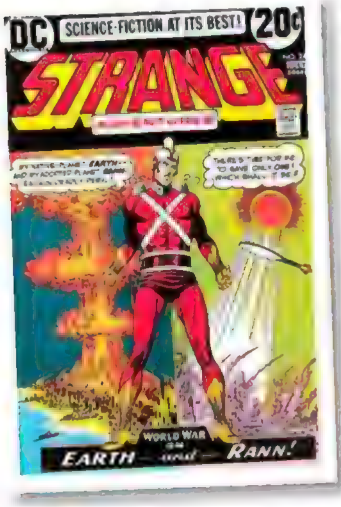
7

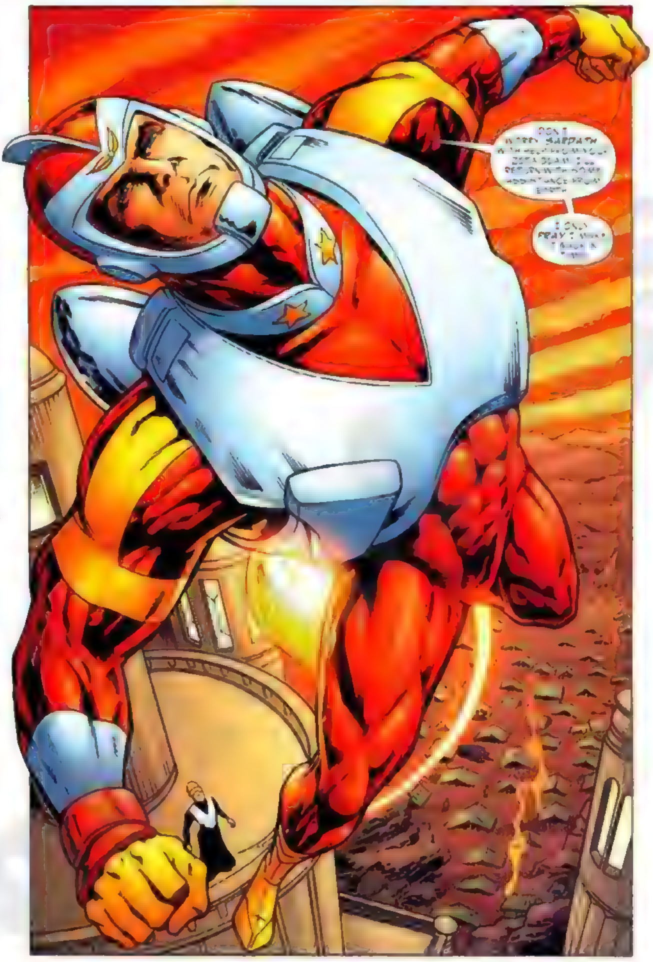
ADAM STRANGE

The launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957 meant nothing was bigger than space in the minds of DC Comics bigwigs, and the company – then known as National – tasked two of its top editors with creating new heroes to take advantage. Adam Strange was the Julie Schwartz contribution, and mixed the Buck Rogers/Flash Gordon tradition with the superhero revival style he'd used to such effect bringing The Flash back from the four-colour grave a year earlier. The first Earthman on another planet – hence 'Adam' – he was a minding-his-own-business archeologist from modern-day America transported across space by a teleportation ray (the 'zeta-beam') to the dying planet Rann, orbiting Alpha Centauri, full of monsters, super-science and adventure. The catch? Every so often the beam 'wears out', throwing him back to boring old Earth where he has no rocket pack or raygun or beautiful Alanna; now he has to wait, gazing at the skies, waiting for a new zeta-beam to whisk him off on his next adventure.

Strange's adventures began in *Showcase* but soon graduated to *Mystery In Space* (and elsewhere), as the menaces that threatened Rann got increasingly bizarre and Adam's solutions more and more linked to plausible real physics and chemistry: writer Gardner F Fox gave each menace a clear and real scientific Achilles' heel, which Adam would always figure out before the end. *Adam Strange* was one of the great strips of the early '60s, and – even when he lost his own book – Strange remained a fixture of the DCU throughout the '70s, with numerous revivals since, including an '80s issue of *Swamp Thing* by Alan Moore and a 2004 miniseries written by Andy Diggle.

Oh, and the *other* editor tasked with creating a space hero? That was Jack Schiff, who came up with *Space Ranger*, a deliberately child-friendly strip full of weird and cute aliens, policed by a superhero space-cop called Rick Starr; no flop, it lasted until 1965, but never showed the magic or the inspiration of *Adam Strange*.

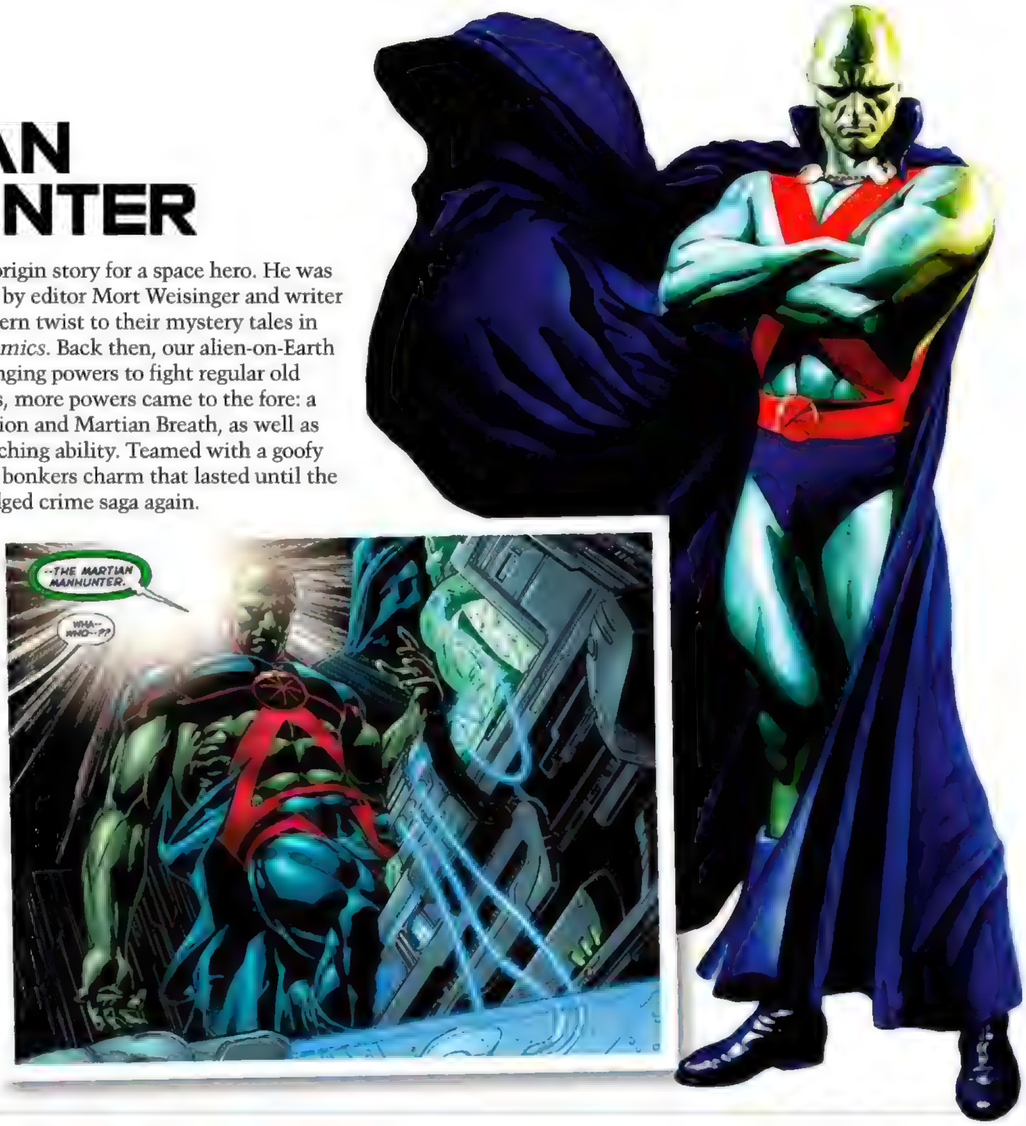




6 MARTIAN MANHUNTER

Now this guy has a strange origin story for a space hero. He was originally developed in 1955 by editor Mort Weisinger and writer Joe Samachson to add a modern twist to their mystery tales in DC/National's *Detective Comics*. Back then, our alien-on-Earth hero had used his shape-changing powers to fight regular old street-level crime, but now, in the early '60s, more powers came to the fore: a Superman-like array, including Martian Vision and Martian Breath, as well as super-strength and a Mr Fantastic-like stretching ability. Teamed with a goofy orange pet, Zook, his new adventures had a bonkers charm that lasted until the mid-'60s, when it became more of a hard-edged crime saga again.

More recent appearances, in *JLA* and elsewhere, have stressed the alien superhero aspects of the character – this guy's like Superman crossed with Mr Spock, essentially noble, but creepy and more unknowable too – but it's really not good enough for a guy with *such* potential and history: a core Justice Leaguer, and with layers of mystery and alienation to explore. Is his key weakness (to fire) too hokey? Is his power set too similar to Big Blue's? The best Manhunter stories – like Gerard Jones' early '90s take – have coupled a '50s alien paranoia aspect with his human civilian identity's sleuthing and top-notch superheroics to winning affect. Martian Manhunter has been one of the great underused DC heroes, and it's surely to be hoped that the recent resurgence of interest in him will finally put that right.


--THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER.
WHA-- WHO--??

5 NEMESIS THE WARLOCK

Most alien heroes don't seem all that *alien* – Caucasian hunks like Superman and Captain Marvel; guys with odd skin colours, like Martian Manhunter and Silver Surfer – but here's one who's totally other. Handsome in his way, sure, but unknowable and seething with danger and deception, Nemesis the Warlock is one of the inspired Pat Mills creations, here teamed with Kevin O'Neill at his naughtiest and most inventive. Though some storylines explore the Warlock's background – his species are magic-users, devilish and vaguely equine – he retains much of his mystery, in terms of motivation and morality, throughout; we side with him because he's a romantic rebel, thorn in the side of the vast human Catholic empire ruling space – and terrorising alien species – from a ruined planet Earth. We don't so much like Nemesis as *hate* Torquemada and his KKK-meets-Spanish-Inquisition Terminators more.

In his first couple of stories – 'Terror Tube' and 'Killer Watt', introducing the concept of Termight, this future Earth where everyone lives in tunnels underground – Nemesis had never shown his face, but rather been a mysterious, unseen figure driving a bizarre spaceship-cum-car, the Blitzspear; once we *did* get to see him, his face resembled the shape of the vehicle itself, nostrils spewing steam. All modern comics owe a debt to Superman; the Silver Surfer is an iconic visual like few others – but no other alien hero holds a strange power quite like Nemesis.

NEMESIS
"THE ORIGIN OF THE EXCESSUS"

4

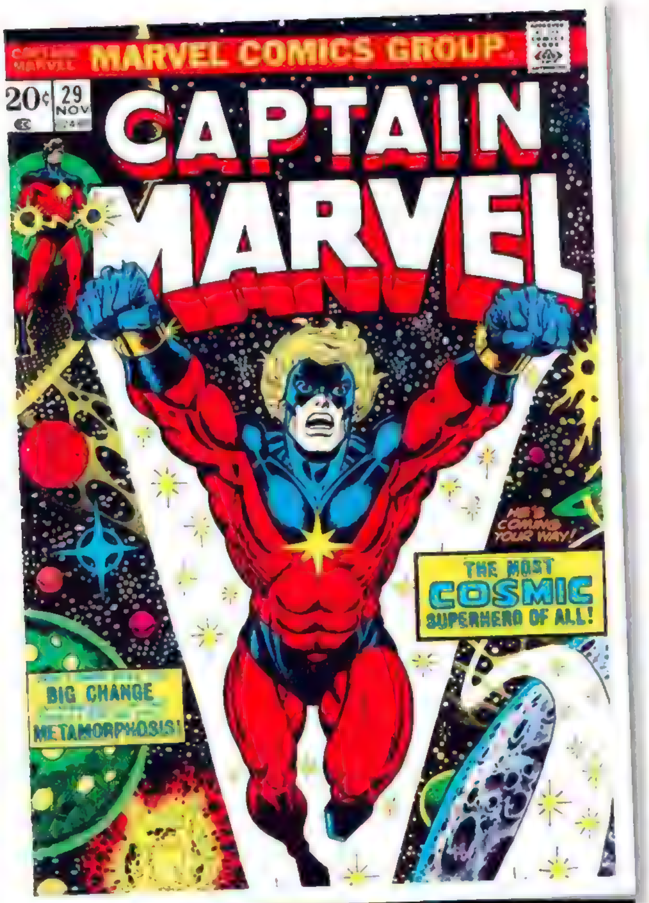
CAPTAIN MARVEL

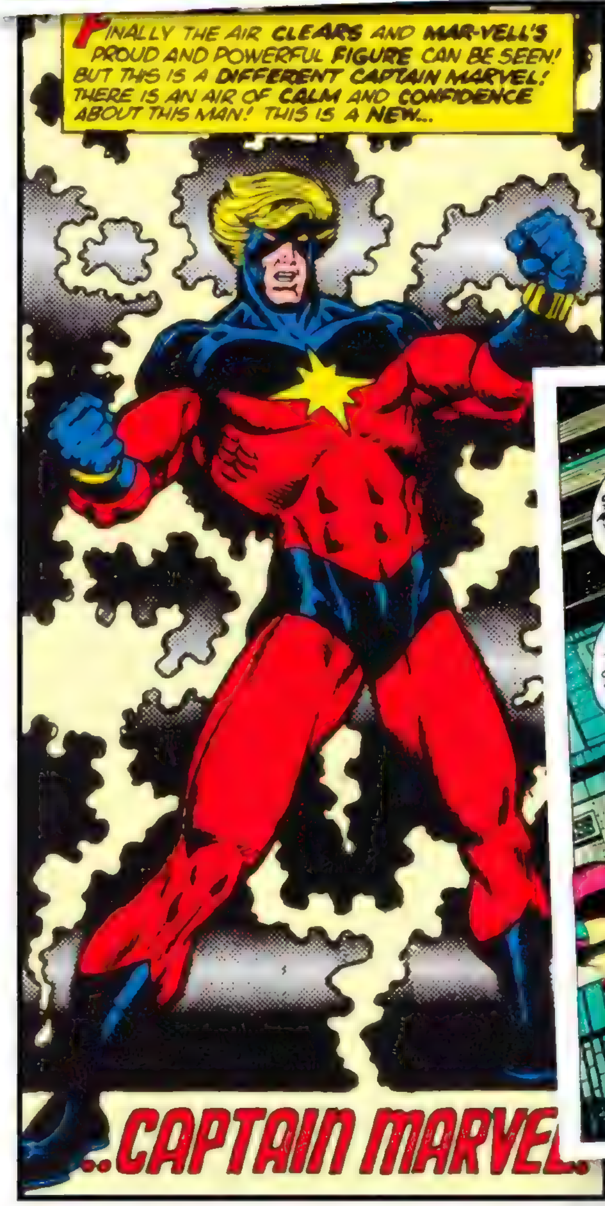
The Kree – advanced, imperialistic and war-hungry aliens of the Marvel U, mostly human-looking though some have blue skin – had only been doing their Roman-empire-in-space thing for a few months in *Fantastic Four* when we met our first Kree hero in *Marvel Super-Heroes*, who soon earned his own series. Captain Mar-Vell was first officer of a Kree mission to spy on Earth, and perhaps experiment on us, but his conscience got the better of him, and he was soon disobeying direct orders, using his Kree tech to pose as a superhero called Captain Marvel. No one seemed particularly fond of the original white and green costume – though it's been surprisingly enduring, and Kree officers wear versions of it to this day – but a later revamp both made him more similar to the old Fawcett Comics Captain Marvel character (Mar-vell had been invented partially to take advantage of a lapsed copyright) and *immensely* different.

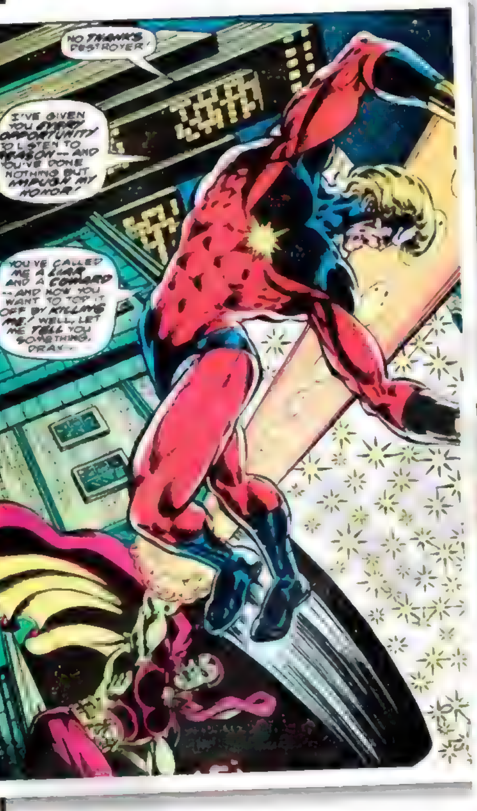
Now clad in red and blue, our hero's body was trapped in Marvel's Negative Zone, only to flash into our universe when Rick Jones – all-purpose teen sidekick from *Hulk*, *Captain America* and others – clashed two wristbands together in times of emergency, Rick's bod temporarily replacing Mar-Vell's in Annihilus' antimatter limbo. It worked better, but still flirted with cancellation – until a revamp under young artist/writer Jim Starlin from 1973 on, which briefly made this strip the most exciting, surprising and experimental Marvel had. Starlin had been a fanzine artist, had done some fill-in work here and there, but now looked like a visionary of sorts: his work was a complex mix of Ditko *Doctor Strange*, Kirby punch and underground comic acid-trip, with striking new characters and intriguing new approaches to everything – powers, layout, storytelling. The ongoing 'Thanos War' storyline was an early Marvel epic, dragging in other heroes briefly – Iron Man and the Thing, notably – and heaving with mood, action, shock reversals and striking images. It's not especially long, but it's hard to think of another cosmic storyline that's made quite this much impact.

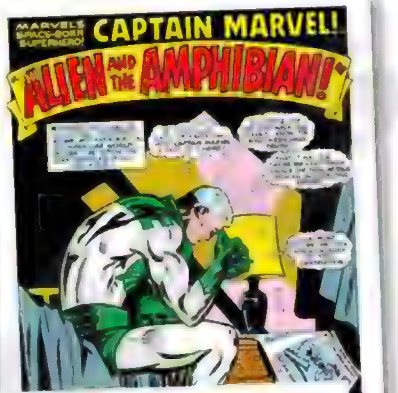
Post-Starlin things rocked along for a while but dipped somewhat eventually, and he returned to the character – by now a very minor player indeed – for the first Marvel graphic novel, *The Death Of Captain Marvel*, in 1982. Here our hero was slowly killed in a very non-comic book way (he slowly wasted away from cancer), and that he has failed to return from the dead since show both the respect many creators hold for the condition and the quality of the piece.

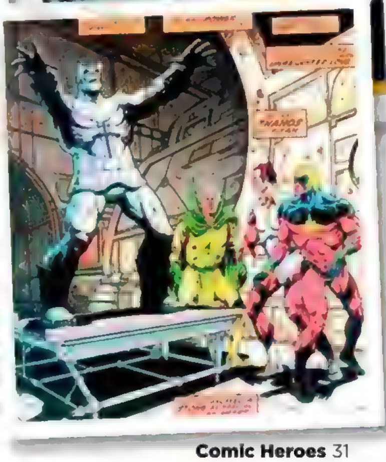
At his weakest, Captain Mar-Vell can seem like a poor character, but the basic concept is strong – invading officers going native and siding with the underdogs is a solid trope, from Hawkeye in *The Last Of The Mohicans* to Kurtz in *Heart Of Darkness* to Sully in *Avatar* – and his one important storyline is a true comic book classic. Plus, his 'cosmic awareness' power – a vague yet useful oneness with the universe – is one of the most intriguing, if most ill-defined, abilities in comics.

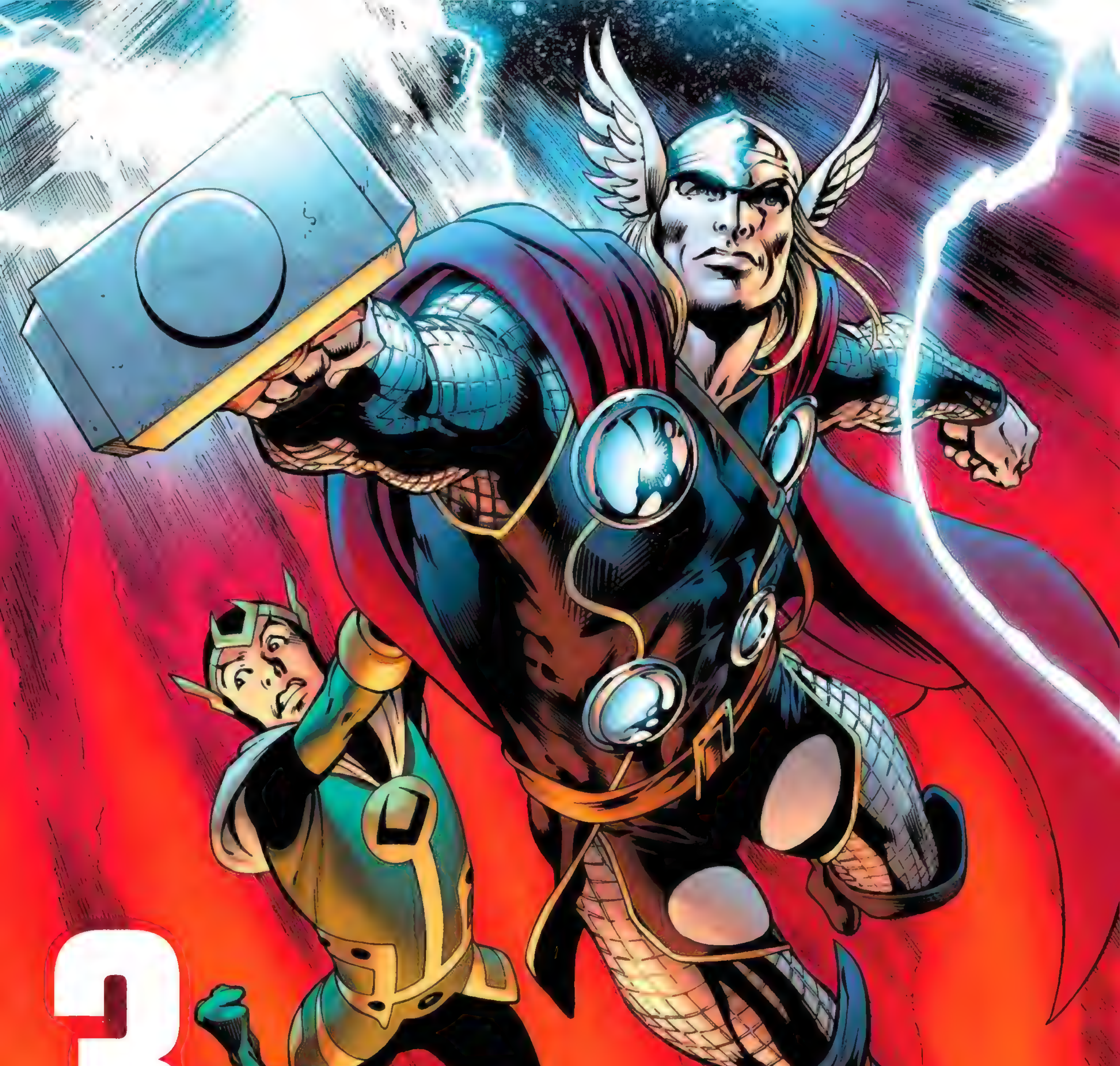

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 29 NOV
CAPTAIN MARVEL
HE'S COMING YOUR WAY!
THE MOST COSMIC SUPERHERO OF ALL!
BIG CHANGE
METAMORPHOSIS!


FINALLY THE AIR CLEARS AND MAR-VELL'S PROUD AND POWERFUL FIGURE CAN BE SEEN! BUT THIS IS A DIFFERENT CAPTAIN MARVEL! THERE IS AN AIR OF CALM AND CONFIDENCE ABOUT THIS MAN! THIS IS A NEW...
...CAPTAIN MARVEL!


NO THANOS' DESTROYER
I'VE GIVEN YOU EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO LISTEN TO REASON -- AND YOU'VE DONE NOTHING BUT IMPUGN MY HONOR!
YOU'VE CALLED ME A LIAR AND A COWARD -- AND NOW YOU WANT TO TOP IT OFF BY KILLING ME! WELL, LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, DRAX--


MARVEL'S SPACE-BORN SUPERHERO!
CAPTAIN MARVEL!
ALIEN AND THE AMPHIBIAN!





3

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
THOR!
THOR
THOR

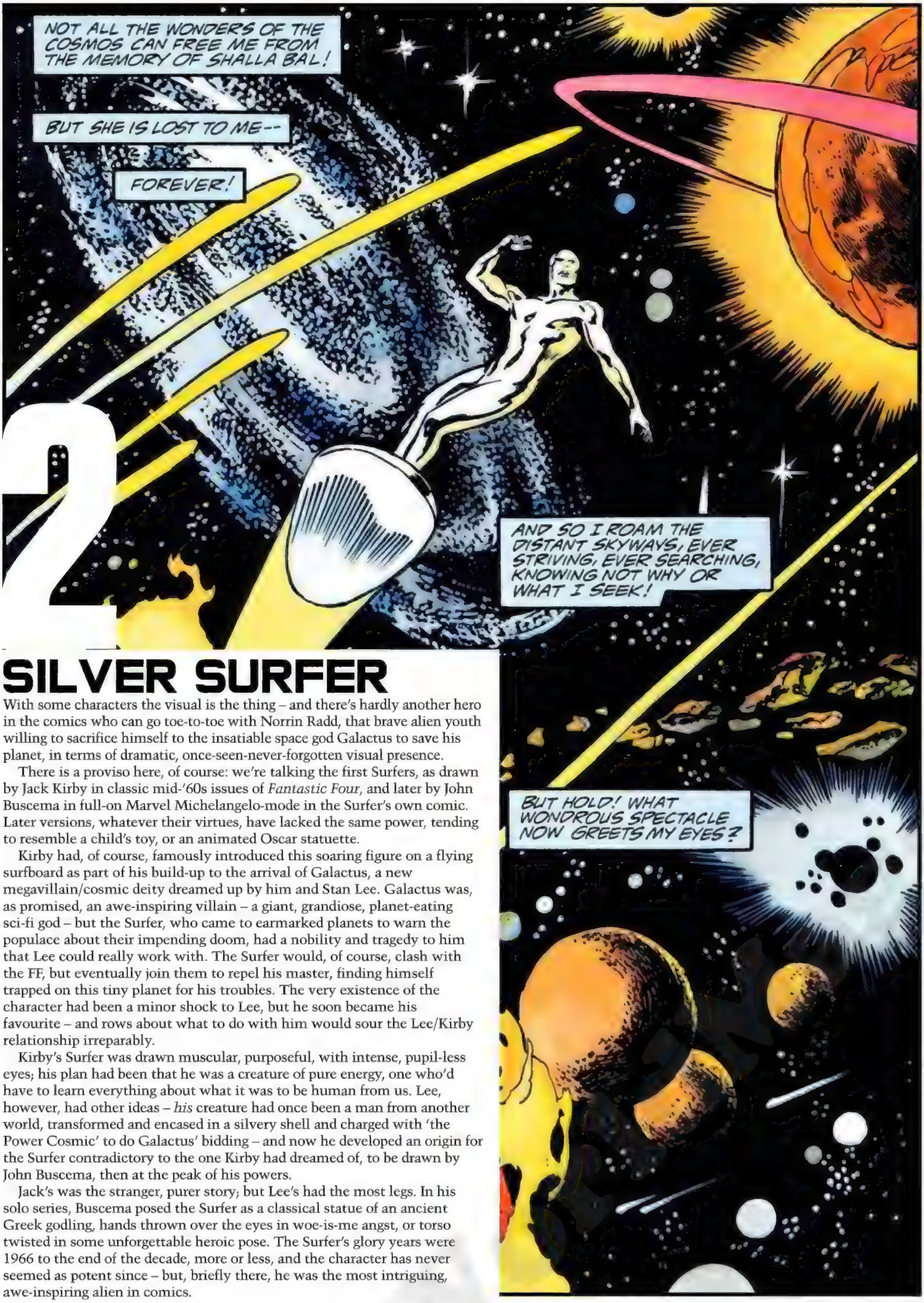
THOR

You might not think of Thor as a space hero, but he surely is one – a human-looking alien and/or god (it remains unclear which) who's initially banished to our world in punishment for a perceived lack of humility, and who's remained here to fight for us ever since.

Though the early Stan Lee/Jack Kirby Thor tales of the first years of Marvel heaved with mythology (Kirby's Asgard was a magical place, where Viking fur-and-beards met unstoppable robots and giant swords), they were packed with sci-fi too, for Thor countered more than his fair share of invading alien species (his very first story had him see off a scouting party from space) and SF-themed menaces in his time: Zarrko the Tomorrow Man, the Radioactive Man, Mr Hyde, the High Evolutionary and his Man-Beast, the list marched on…

Kirby's endless levels of invention on *Fantastic Four* in the '60s is well-noted, but his work on *Thor* was only the tiniest hair-breadth behind, and after his creation of Galactus in the *FF*, the artist would throw a lot of his fascination with all matters cosmic into *Thor* too. Those ultimate capitalists, the Colonizers of Rigel, showed a new (and brilliantly designed) twist on the alien invader trope, while Ego the Living Planet (a whole world with a face!) was another of his unforgettable stop-you-dead visuals; more recently, Thor's been in space adventures countless times, confronting the Celestial Fourth Host at one point, and taking centre stage in almost every major Marvel universe event in one way or another.

Brilliantly imagined, heaving with great characters, and one of the major building blocks of the Marvel U, Thor's cosmic adventures have always run parallel to the more myth-inspired stuff – while his own status, as an emissary from elsewhere come to live amongst us, parallels the experiences of the more obviously alien heroes too. Thor is one of Marvel's greatest creations – even if the comics themselves haven't always been good enough to 'hammer' that point home.


NOT ALL THE WONDERS OF THE COSMOS CAN FREE ME FROM THE MEMORY OF SHALLA BAL!
BUT SHE IS LOST TO ME--
FOREVER!
AND SO I ROAM THE DISTANT SKYWAYS, EVER STRIVING, EVER SEARCHING, KNOWING NOT WHY OR WHAT I SEEK!
BUT HOLD! WHAT WONDROUS SPECTACLE NOW GREETS MY EYES?

2

SILVER SURFER

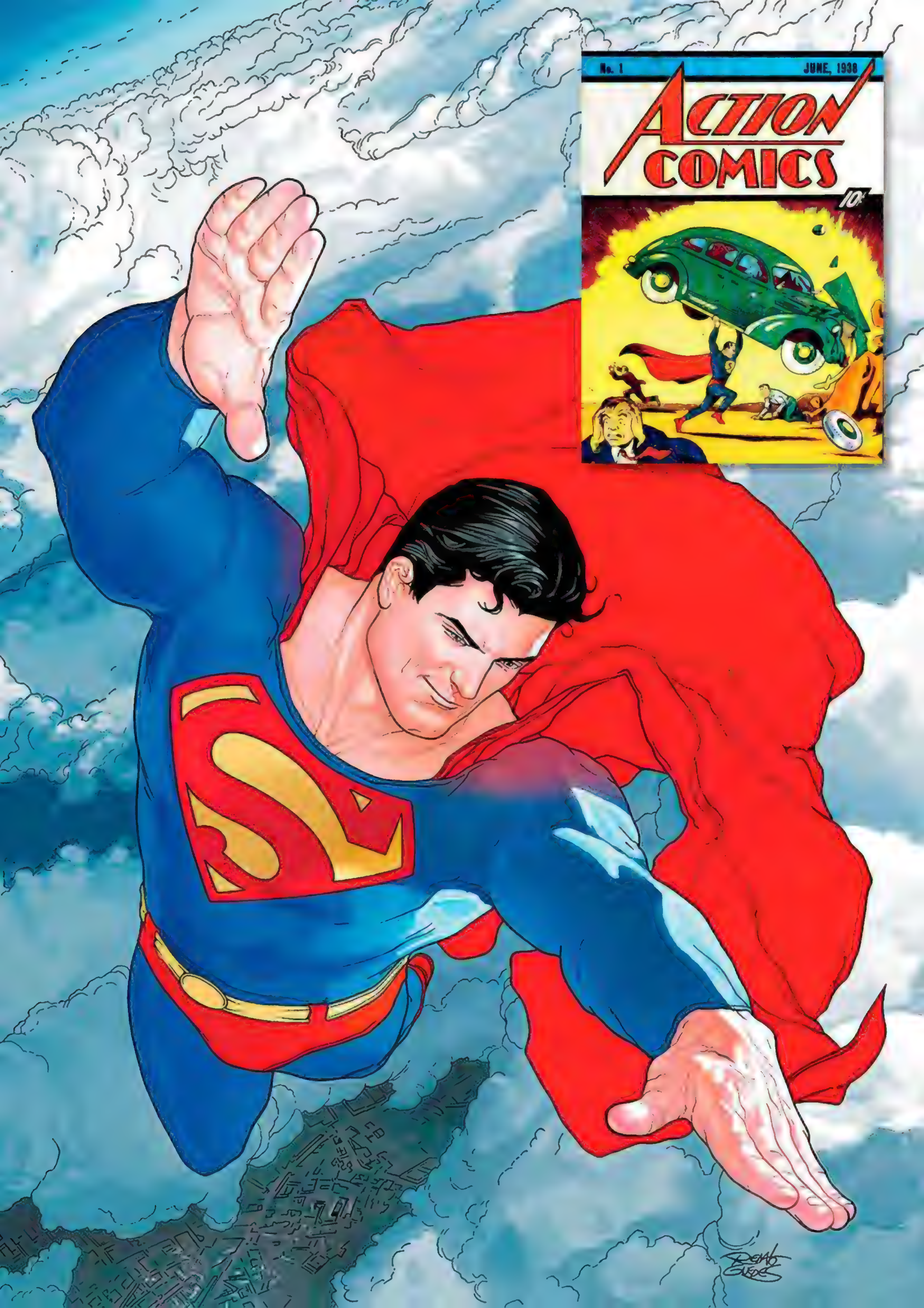
With some characters the visual is the thing – and there's hardly another hero in the comics who can go toe-to-toe with Norrin Radd, that brave alien youth willing to sacrifice himself to the insatiable space god Galactus to save his planet, in terms of dramatic, once-seen-never-forgotten visual presence.

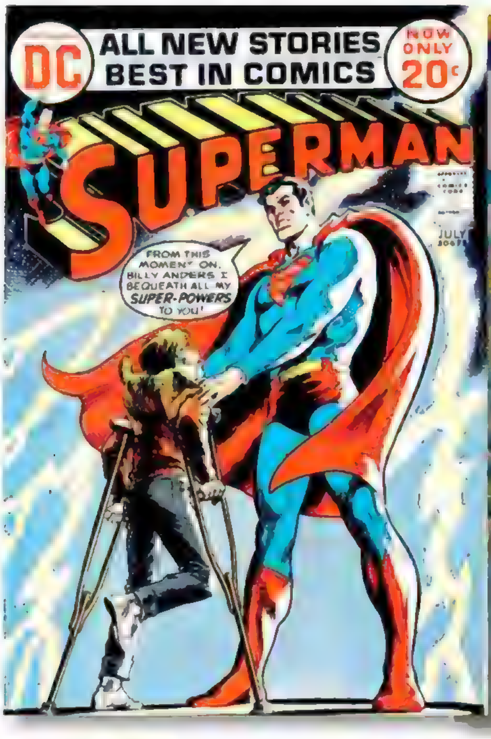
There is a proviso here, of course: we're talking the first Surfers, as drawn by Jack Kirby in classic mid-'60s issues of *Fantastic Four*, and later by John Buscema in full-on Marvel Michelangelo-mode in the Surfer's own comic. Later versions, whatever their virtues, have lacked the same power, tending to resemble a child's toy, or an animated Oscar statuette.

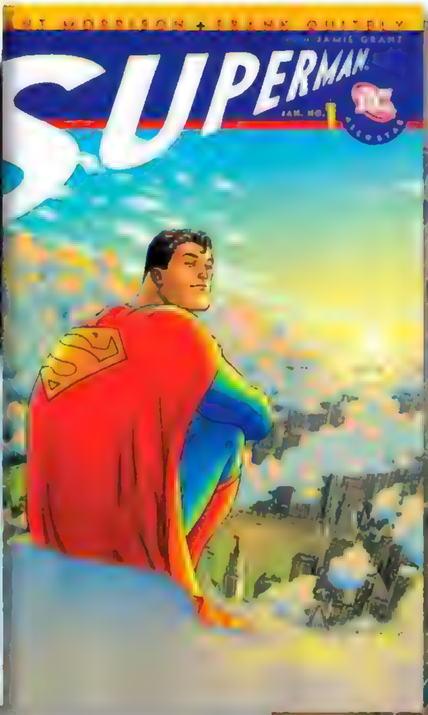
Kirby had, of course, famously introduced this soaring figure on a flying surfboard as part of his build-up to the arrival of Galactus, a new megavillain/cosmic deity dreamed up by him and Stan Lee. Galactus was, as promised, an awe-inspiring villain – a giant, grandiose, planet-eating sci-fi god – but the Surfer, who came to earmarked planets to warn the populace about their impending doom, had a nobility and tragedy to him that Lee could really work with. The Surfer would, of course, clash with the FF, but eventually join them to repel his master, finding himself trapped on this tiny planet for his troubles. The very existence of the character had been a minor shock to Lee, but he soon became his favourite – and rows about what to do with him would sour the Lee/Kirby relationship irreparably.

Kirby's Surfer was drawn muscular, purposeful, with intense, pupil-less eyes; his plan had been that he was a creature of pure energy, one who'd have to learn everything about what it was to be human from us. Lee, however, had other ideas – *his* creature had once been a man from another world, transformed and encased in a silvery shell and charged with 'the Power Cosmic' to do Galactus' bidding – and now he developed an origin for the Surfer contradictory to the one Kirby had dreamed of, to be drawn by John Buscema, then at the peak of his powers.

Jack's was the stranger, purer story; but Lee's had the most legs. In his solo series, Buscema posed the Surfer as a classical statue of an ancient Greek godling, hands thrown over the eyes in woe-is-me angst, or torso twisted in some unforgettable heroic pose. The Surfer's glory years were 1966 to the end of the decade, more or less, and the character has never seemed as potent since – but, briefly there, he was the most intriguing, awe-inspiring alien in comics.


No. 1
JUNE, 1938
ACTION COMICS
10¢
RENATO GUEDES


DC
ALL NEW STORIES
BEST IN COMICS
NOW ONLY 20¢
SUPERMAN
FROM THIS MOMENT ON, BILLY ANDERS I BEQUEATH ALL MY SUPER-POWERS TO YOU!



1

SUPERMAN

One of the world's best recognised cultural icons, Superman was, of course, the very first costumed and superpowered superhero; virtually every character we write about here in *Comic Heroes* owes something to Kal-El, the ultimate immigrant from beyond the stars, coming to America to make much right, and provide hope and inspiration.

But Superman's earliest years in *Action Comics* – as explored to such fascinating effect by Grant Morrison recently, of course – dwelled little on Clark Kent's space heritage, preferring to put him up against Earthbound foes: a wife-beater and political corruption in his earliest story, then gimmicky gangsters like Toyman and the Prankster and, of course, Nazis and the Japanese during the war years. Lex Luthor debuts early – in *Action* #23, April 1940, sporting a shock of red hair – but would take a decade or more to become the mega-villain we now know; still, his very human, non-powered brand of evil would in some ways define what early Superman stood against. Superman's creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were Jewish, of course, as was the comic book industry to large part – Siegel's family were from Lithuania, Shuster's Dutch and Ukrainian, and the immigrant experience underpinned all they did.

It was in the late '40s and into the '50s that *National Comics* – later DC, of course – was to really start to explore Superman's Kryptonian background, expanding his origin in a piece called 'The Kid From Krypton' in *Action* #158 and soon throwing more alien villains into the mix. But it wasn't until the late '50s that writer Otto Binder – co-creator of Supergirl, Brainiac, Krypto and more – found the secret weapon for Superman (and for most other successful superheroes ever since): pathos. In the classic 'Superman Returns To Krypton' (*Superman* #141, November 1960) – a rare full-issue story, three times the length of the typical DC Comics tale of the era – we see more of our hero's poor, doomed home planet, and are forced to understand his deep-seated heartbreak at the loss of his entire heritage. Not all the powers in the world – nor the love of Lois, or saving Earth numerous times – could make up for his loss. Fate would not be dodged.

> **“His alien origins proved vital to the character's success”**

From the very first Superman story, with its overt and unexpected reference to Moses, the Jewish experience had underscored the character, but now we were hammered with Superman's obsessive efforts to return to his home-world, to somehow save it, to keep safe what reminders of it (the Bottle City of Kandor chiefly, of course) he could salvage. Our hero, it became clear, was desperate to come to terms with a holocaust of his own… well, the parallels couldn't be more clear.

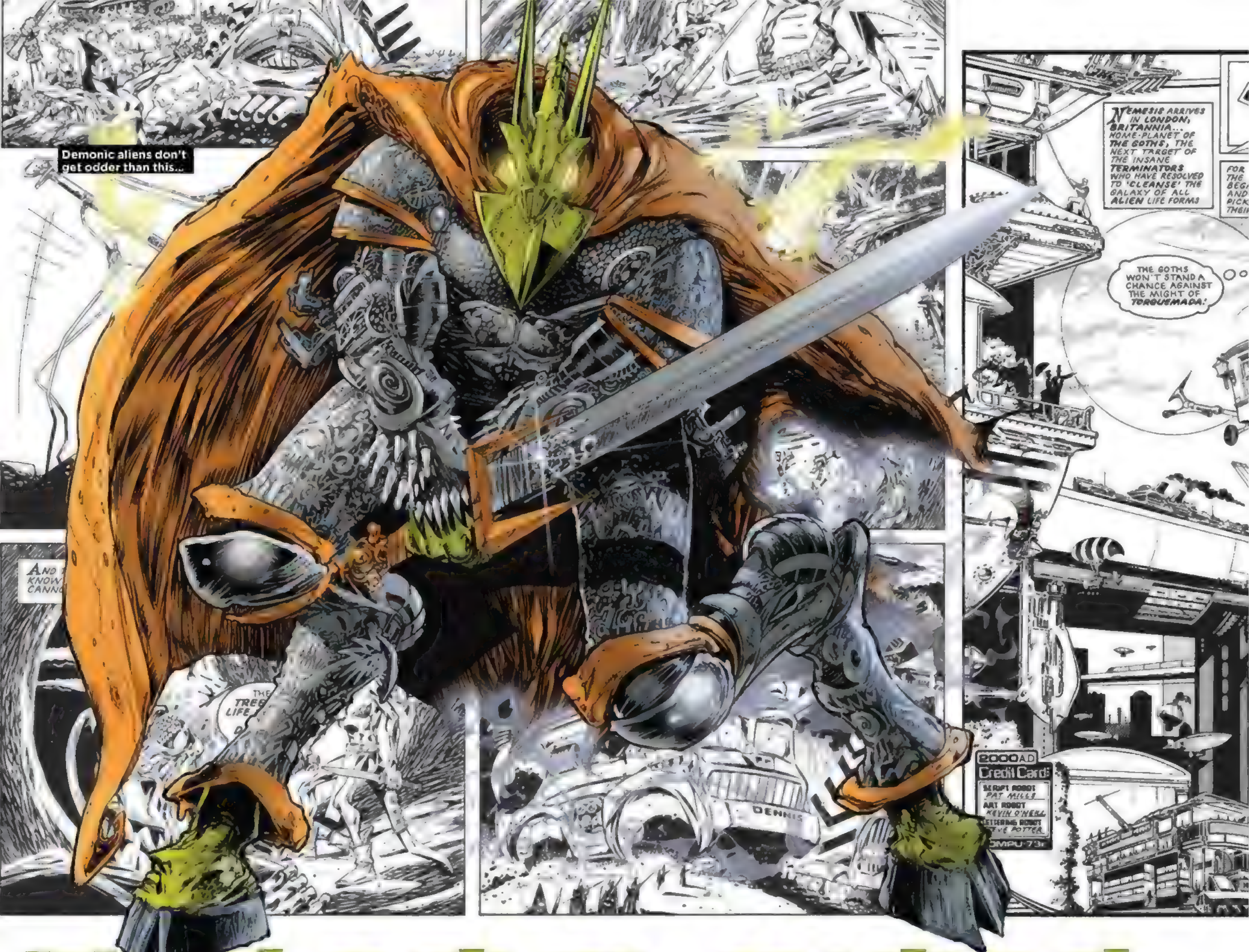
Though tragedy gave him power – and few comics, even those from a new upstart called Marvel that would make tragic heroes its USP, have ever throbbed with deep-seated emotion quite like the early '60s Superman tales – there's a flipside to the Man of Steel's alien heritage too. It's that to be foreign is to be different, exotic – and often great fun.

With the new 'Red Sun' stories of the era, more effort was made to give Superman's powers a degree of scientific plausibility – good luck with that – while reader reaction and requests in the innovative new letters' pages brought a second Kryptonian (Kara Zor-El, a teenage Supergirl with powers to rival cousin Clark's), and with her a sense of family. Red kryptonite (green weakened Superman, but the ruby version could do *anything*, turning him temporarily into a toddler, say, or a man-ant) felt fresh too, as did the introduction of ever-wilder 'Imaginary Stories', Jimmy Olsen's career as Elastic Lad, and the arrival of both Bizarro and strange superpowered teens from the future (soon to be revealed as The Legion of Super-Heroes).

In other words, Superman's alien origins proved vital to the character's success in at least four vital ways: it explained his unexplainable powers, at least in part; it gave him an outsider's view of the Earth and its problems, the better to confront them; it heaped him with tragedy, successive generations of writer and editor discovering that it's not a hero's powers that make him compelling so much as his weaknesses; and it provided endless story possibilities, opening Superman (and DC as a whole) up to a rich mythology and an endless stream of magically bizarre concepts and characters.

The key to Superman is that he's two things in one: the impossibly powerful prince from a forever-lost otherworld, and the nice farm boy, brought up in rural Smallville, Kansas (far from its original home, which had *seemed* to be just inland from Metropolis, but then the geography of the DC Universe always was a rather fluid thing).

This quiet burg of high schools and general stores – a living Norman Rockwell painting, where skies are blue and doors doubtless unlocked – has an unfortunate habit of attracting alien invasions and big city gangsters, but is otherwise as grounded, normal a place to grow up as it's possible to imagine. It's vital that Superman is an alien – but that he's one of us is an important part of his make-up too. CH


Demonic aliens don't get odder than this...

NEMESIS ARRIVES IN LONDON, BRITANNIA... HOME-PLANET OF THE GOTHS, THE NEXT TARGET OF THE INSANE TERMINATORS WHO HAVE RESOLVED TO 'CLEANSE' THE GALAXY OF ALL ALIEN LIFE FORMS
THE GOTHS WON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE MIGHT OF TORQUEMADA!
2000AD Credit Card
SCRIPT ROBOT PAT MILLS
ART ROBOT KEVIN O'NEILL
DENNIS

THE DEVIL INSIDE

The best good guys have something dark about them, and the greatest villains boast a sliver of something noble – or, at least, redeemable. Co-creator **Pat Mills** reveals the truth about *2000 AD*'s amazing, unknowable Nemesis the Warlock...

When Kevin O'Neill and I first began telling stories about the alien hero Nemesis the Warlock, we had no idea where the serial was going – other than we wanted it to be the wildest story *2000 AD* had ever produced, and to break all the rules of traditional comic formatting and traditional heroes. So when Torquemada, head of the Terminators, in the first story – 'Terror Tube' – warns people to watch out for the deviant Nemesis and urges them to 'Be Pure! Be Vigilant! Behave!' (words later inscribed on the Berlin Wall!) I had no idea what the Grand Master's problem was, or why Nemesis was such a threat to humanity.

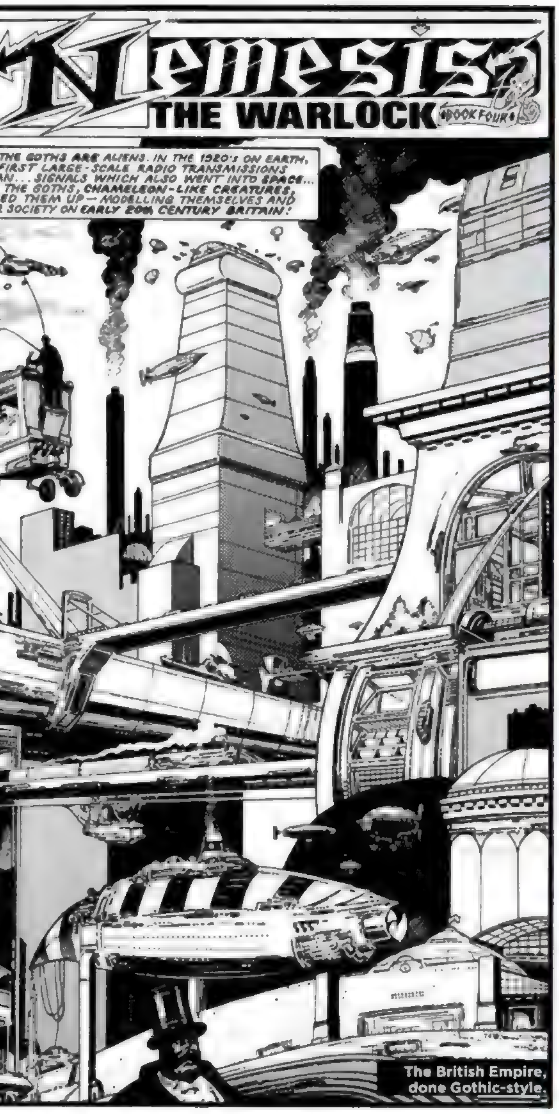
Nemesis was a story that evolved out of my subconscious, rather than being constructed consciously as an action hero adventure story. It was all the stronger and the weirder for it, because it trawls some very deep, dark areas of what Jung would call 'the collective unconscious'. In effect, I was writing it on autopilot, guided by the Muse, without any real sense of why I was driving down some tubes and avoiding others. So it was only later that my Muse revealed to me that the conflict had its origins in outer space, where humans were the monsters intent on wiping out all alien life forms.

Given humanity's track record with sentient beings like dolphins and whales, as well as with our own indigenous people, this seems highly likely – even though every *other* space opera presents a polar opposite point of view. It also became clear to me that Torquemada stood for racism, fascism, colonialism and various negative aspects of Catholicism – no wonder he was voted British comics' favourite villain. Fifty shades of darkness wrapped around one fanatic.

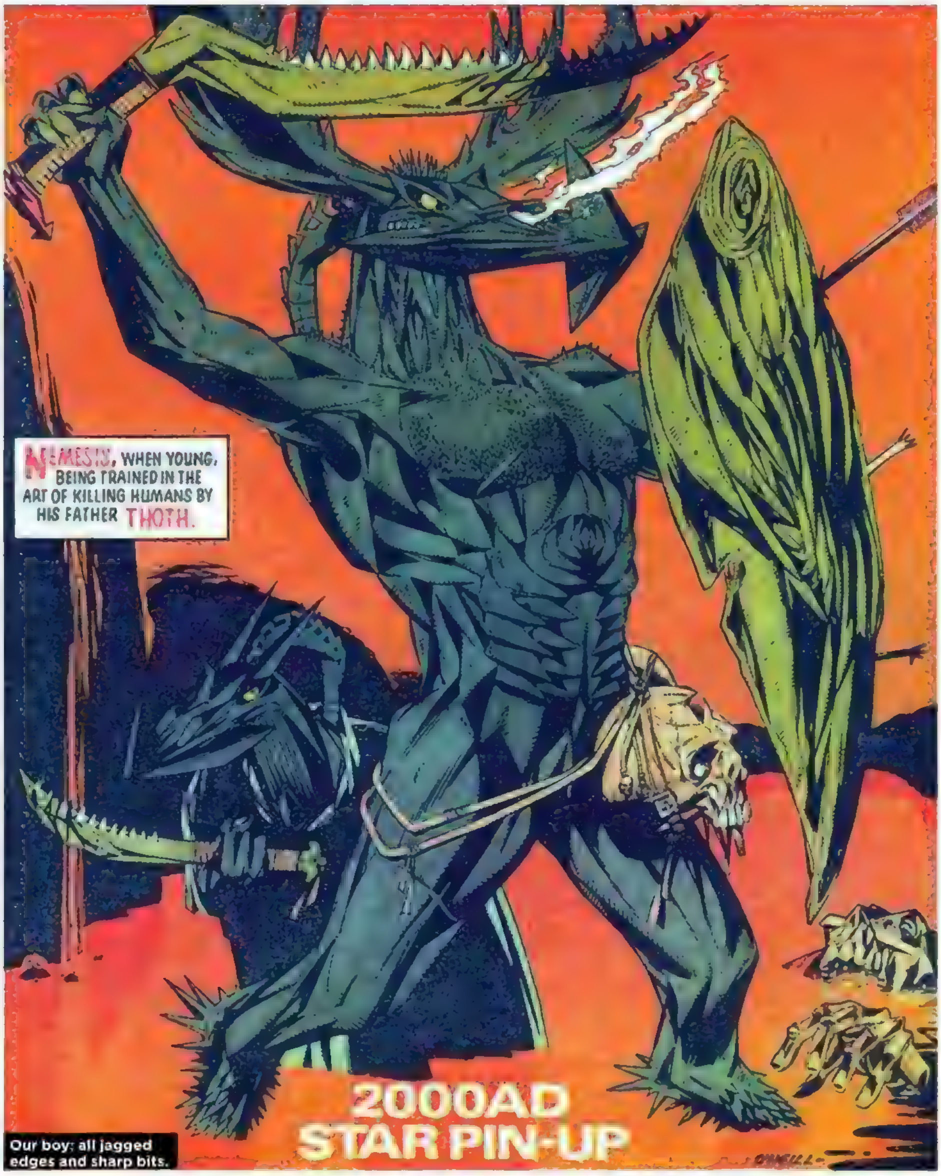
As former Catholics, Kevin and I had enormous fun with our Spanish Inquisition in Space. It's good to mock monsters. It cuts them down to size. The battle hymn of the Terminators is 'the Deviatus' and, I can now reveal, it should be sung to the tune of *Onward Christian Soldiers*:

Watch ye for the mark of the Deviant
The tentacle and claw
The scaly skin, the bug eyes,
The cloven hoof and paw.

All images © 2013 Rebellion A/S


emesis
THE WARLOCK
BOOK FOUR
THE GOTHS ARE ALIENS. IN THE 1920's ON EARTH,
FIRST LARGE-SCALE RADIO TRANSMISSIONS
AN... SIGNALS WHICH ALSO WENT INTO SPACE...
THE GOTHS, CHAMELEON-LIKE CREATURES,
ED THEM UP – MODELLING THEMSELVES AND
R SOCIETY ON EARLY 20th CENTURY BRITAIN!

The British Empire, done Gothic-style.


NEMESIS, WHEN YOUNG, BEING TRAINED IN THE ART OF KILLING HUMANS BY HIS FATHER THOTH.
2000AD STAR PIN-UP

Our boy: all jagged edges and sharp bits.

With sword and axe and mace,
We cleanse, we purify,
We never show any mercy,
All Aliens must die!

Beware of creatures lurking
In shadow or in cave,
Heed the words of Torquemada:
Be Pure! Be Vigilant! Behave!

Sadly I sing flat, but I like to think this revelation might one day encourage a musical rendition on YouTube.

Inspired by listening to boyhood pulpit rants, I also had Torquemada warn his congregation, 'The Deviant is at the door! The Werewolf is at the window! The Vampire is up your ventilation shaft!' But I soon had to tone things down a touch, because of possible censorship – and because Kevin's brilliant interpretations often made scenes even *more* risqué.

Supposing, for example, if I'd given him this sequence to illustrate, which I was often tempted to write:

Pic 1 Terminator kneels at Torquemada's feet.
Terminator: Your Holiness, I am not worthy….
Torquemada: That's true. You most certainly are not.
Terminator: But may I… may I kiss your ring?
Pic 2 Surprised and thoughtful look on Torquemada's face as he considers this request. No dialogue
Pic 3 Torquemada smiles knowingly through his sinister mask.
Torquemada: Later perhaps…

> **“ Real life is always 1,000 times more bonkers than anything we fiction writers can dream up ”**

Kevin came up with many wonderfully subversive ideas for *Nemesis*. Apart from devising the Gothic Empire – the greatest steampunk art ever seen in comics – he also created the Torquemada family, and that memorable poster where Torquemada looks sternly at the readers and warns them, 'Sleep is no refuge for impure thoughts'. This led to a story where we learn that every apartment has a purity meter recording the citizens' very *thoughts*. Torquemada's Thought Police regularly check the meters to ensure the citizens are not fantasising about, or having truck with, the extraterrestrial. *The Not The Nine O'Clock News* 'I Like Trucking' song was in my mind when I wrote such scenes.

If you think all this is rather ungracious or unlikely, consider that the Vatican has an observatory in Arizona staffed by Jesuits and dedicated to finding alien life forms. According to Father Chris Corbally, the project's deputy director, "If civilisation were to be found on other planets, and it were feasible to communicate, then we would want to send missionaries to save them." Real life is always 1,000 times more bonkers (and more sinister) than anything we fiction writers can dream up.

"E-C, GO HOME!"

Okay, Torquemada's pretty straightforward, now what about that 'dirty trucker' Nemesis? A demonic warlock – 'him with the horns and the hooves' – who has an exposed spine, spits fire and venom from an extended pointed head which I would obliquely infer (given that *2000 AD* was then aimed at a younger readership) was his instrument of procreation.

As his wife, Chira, was a four-legged centaur whom Nemesis liked to gallop around on, this may well lead you to some unwanted thoughts about the way in which his hideous offspring Thoth was conceived. Sorry about that.

It would have been so much easier – and more mainstream – to have a good-looking

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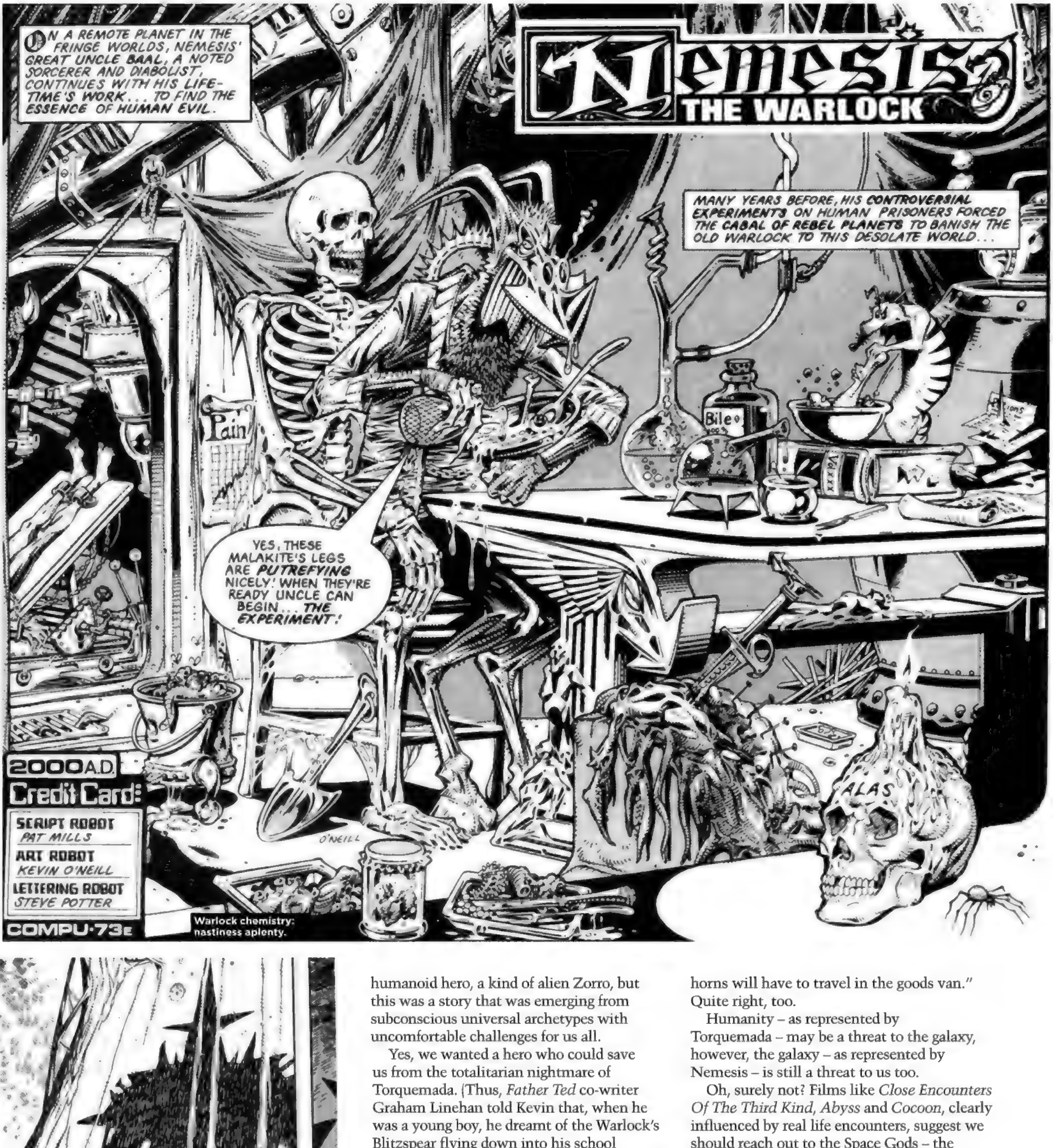

ON A REMOTE PLANET IN THE FRINGE WORLDS, NEMESIS' GREAT UNCLE BAAL, A NOTED SORCERER AND DIABOLIST, CONTINUES WITH HIS LIFE-TIME'S WORK... TO FIND THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN EVIL.
NEMESIS THE WARLOCK
MANY YEARS BEFORE, HIS CONTROVERSIAL EXPERIMENTS ON HUMAN PRISONERS FORCED THE CABAL OF REBEL PLANETS TO BANISH THE OLD WARLOCK TO THIS DESOLATE WORLD...
YES, THESE MALAKITE'S LEGS ARE PUTREFYING NICELY! WHEN THEY'RE READY UNCLE CAN BEGIN... THE EXPERIMENT!
Pain
Bile
ALAS
O'NEILL
2000 A.D. Credit Card:
SCRIPT ROBOT PAT MILLS
ART ROBOT KEVIN O'NEILL
LETTERING ROBOT STEVE POTTER
COMPU-73E

Warlock chemistry: nastiness aplenty.

Hidden terrors lurk in every shadow...

humanoid hero, a kind of alien Zorro, but this was a story that was emerging from subconscious universal archetypes with uncomfortable challenges for us all.

Yes, we wanted a hero who could save us from the totalitarian nightmare of Torquemada. (Thus, *Father Ted* co-writer Graham Linehan told Kevin that, when he was a young boy, he dreamt of the Warlock's Blitzspear flying down into his school playground to rescue him. If it was anything like my Catholic school, I can relate to that.)

HORNED HERO

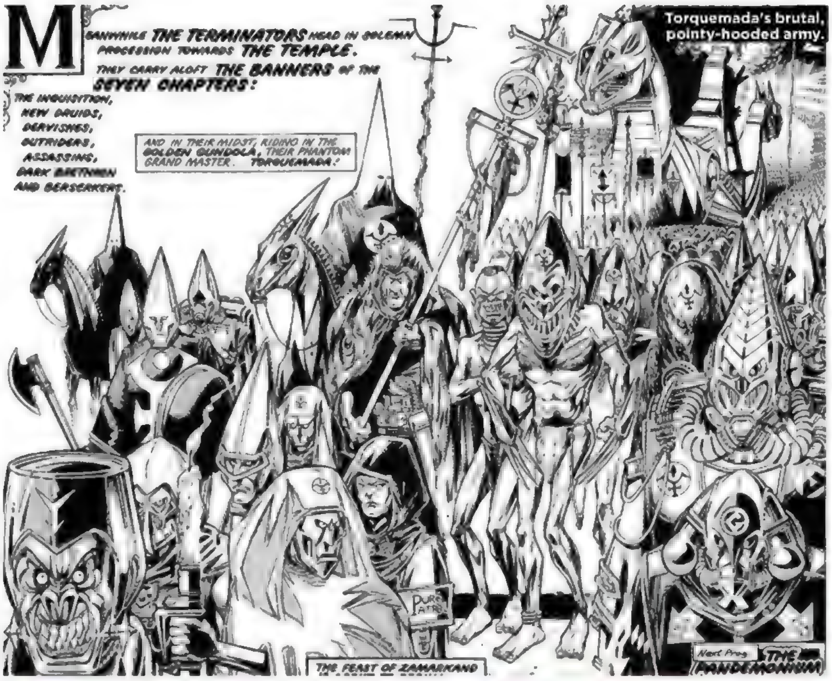
But how do we feel about our hero being a Beelzebub lookalike? Answer: not very good, and that's healthy. Because we can clearly see he's a wrong 'un. So when film-maker Tony Luke travelled by train down to my house for a photoshoot, bringing with him two splendid masks of Torquemada and Nemesis, the ticket collector said Torquemada could stay in the passenger compartment, "but that one with the horns will have to travel in the goods van." Quite right, too.

Humanity – as represented by Torquemada – may be a threat to the galaxy, however, the galaxy – as represented by Nemesis – is still a threat to us too.

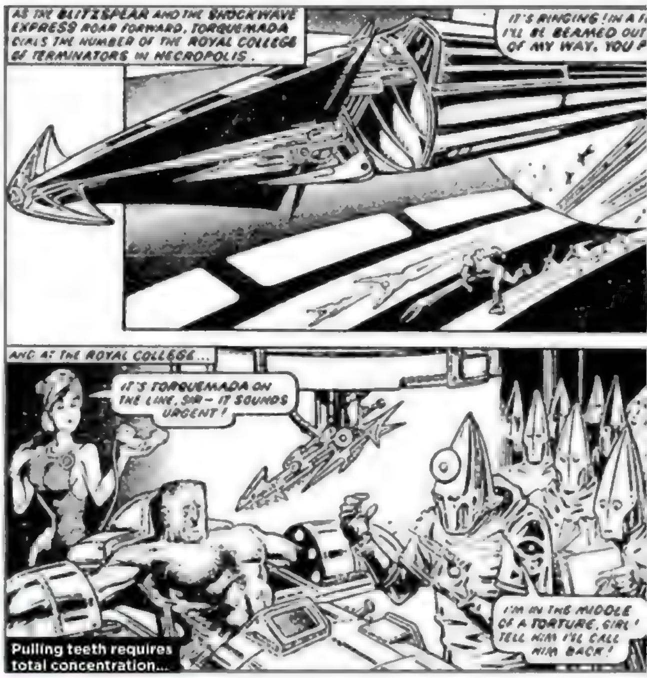
Oh, surely not? Films like *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*, *Abyss* and *Cocoon*, clearly influenced by real life encounters, suggest we should reach out to the Space Gods – the Extra-Celestials, as I call them – and trust them, because they fill our minds with Ecstasy.

Remember all those wonderful ecstatic smiles at the end of *CE3K*, when they wished upon a star? Sorry – it's just a psychic trick, folks. The E-Cs simply know how to push our pleasure buttons. It's 'beads for the natives'.

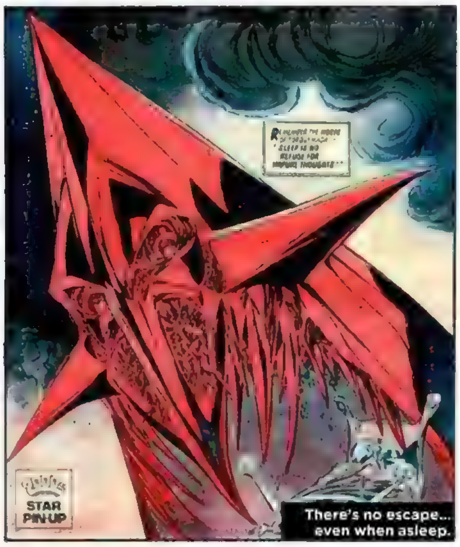
People I know personally – who I can vouch for having had genuine CE3Ks – have not benefited from such encounters, to put it gently. It's all part of an ingenious and endlessly repeating Messianic program, designed to turn us into victims and to abdicate responsibility for ourselves. "Lead us, O Great Ones. Show us


MEANWHILE THE TERMINATORS HEAD IN SOLEMN PROCESSION TOWARDS THE TEMPLE.
THEY CARRY ALOFT THE BANNERS OF THE SEVEN CHAPTERS:
THE INQUISITION, NEW DRUIDS, DERVISHES, OUTRIDERS, ASSASSINS, DARK BRETHREN AND BERSERKERS.
AND IN THEIR MIDST, RIDING IN THE GOLDEN GUNDOLA, THEIR PHANTOM GRAND MASTER... TORQUEMADA!
THE FEAST OF ZAMARKAND
Next Prog THE PANDEMONIUM

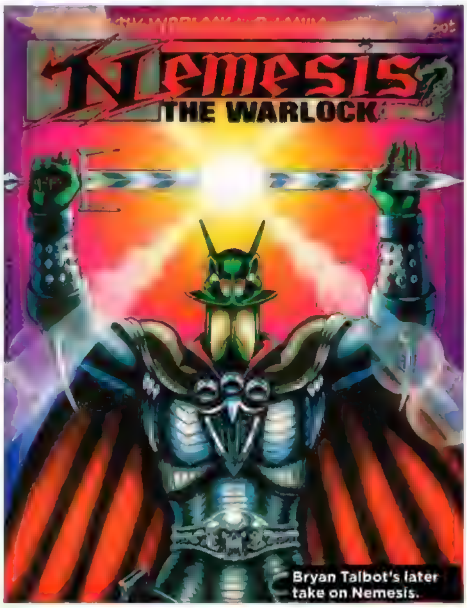
Torquemada's brutal, pointy-hooded army.


AS THE BLITZSPEAR AND THE SHOCKWAVE EXPRESS ROAR FORWARD, TORQUEMADA DIALS THE NUMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF TERMINATORS IN NECROPOLIS.
IT'S RINGING! IN A F
I'LL BE BEAMED OUT
OF MY WAY. YOU F
AND AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE...
IT'S TORQUEMADA ON THE LINE, SIR – IT SOUNDS URGENT!
I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF A TORTURE, GIRL! TELL HIM I'LL CALL HIM BACK!

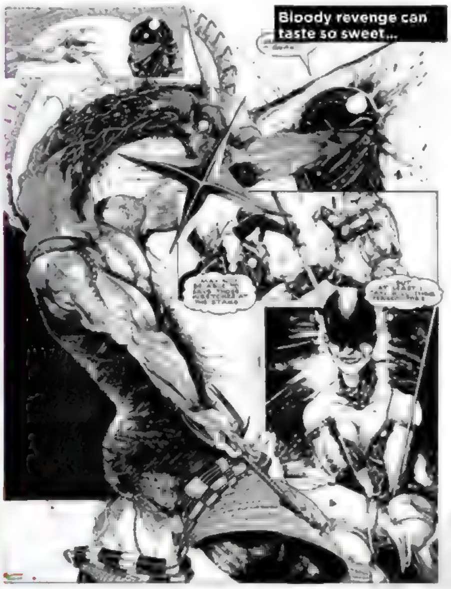
Pulling teeth requires total concentration...



There's no escape... even when asleep.


NEMESIS THE WARLOCK

Bryan Talbot's later take on Nemesis.



Bloody revenge can taste so sweet...

“Nemesis and all the other Space Gods should be regarded with deep suspicion”

the way. Because we're rubbish and you have all the answers." Horrible!

Nemesis and all the other Space Gods – especially the handsome, heroic, human variety – should be regarded with deep suspicion. Our instincts tell us they're not right. We are rightly designed to be wary of strangers, and we should follow our instincts. (In this context of galactic aliens alone, Torquemada was right.)

So the Extra-Celestials adopt a variety of heroic or religious disguises to win our trust, overcome our suspicion, override our intuition and seduce us into their invariably authoritarian and destructive belief systems. Regrettably, the E-Cs – in fiction and in fact – *do* seem to fool most of the people most of the time.

I'm not sure how they do it. Is it just down to performing science fiction miracles and pushing Ecstasy? And why does their psychic MDMA rarely work on me? Once I bought a New Age book on angels (just another name for aliens) – for research, I hasten to add – and my Muse/subconscious woke me up at 3am and angrily told me to throw that 'disgusting trash' out of the house. She gave me no peace until I did. She was right. Just think about what the E-Cs did to Sodom and Gomorrah – and why.

And this is why Nemesis needs to be so uncompromising, both visually and in his personality. So there's no possibility of you liking him! You're not likely to be suckered by him, the way you may be by some of the more accessible and charismatic Space Gods.

That's why Graham Lineham said he wouldn't mind being rescued by the Blitzspear, a sentient animal – but he made a point of tweeting me to say he didn't mean Nemesis. Well, would you accept a lift from Satan? Just because Torquemada is a bad guy, doesn't make Nemesis a good guy.

Yes, Nemesis *does* do heroic deeds. But Space Gods need to, in order to sell their nonsense to us. *Prometheus* and *Alien* are healthier guidelines than *Close Encounters*. *Nemesis* is as close as I can persuade my Muse to telling me what they are really all about.

But he is necessarily incomplete. I've always felt there's something not fully rounded about him, despite my detailed exploration of his world and his family. That's because I don't want to get any closer to the flame. I'll leave that to Mr Lovecraft. ▪

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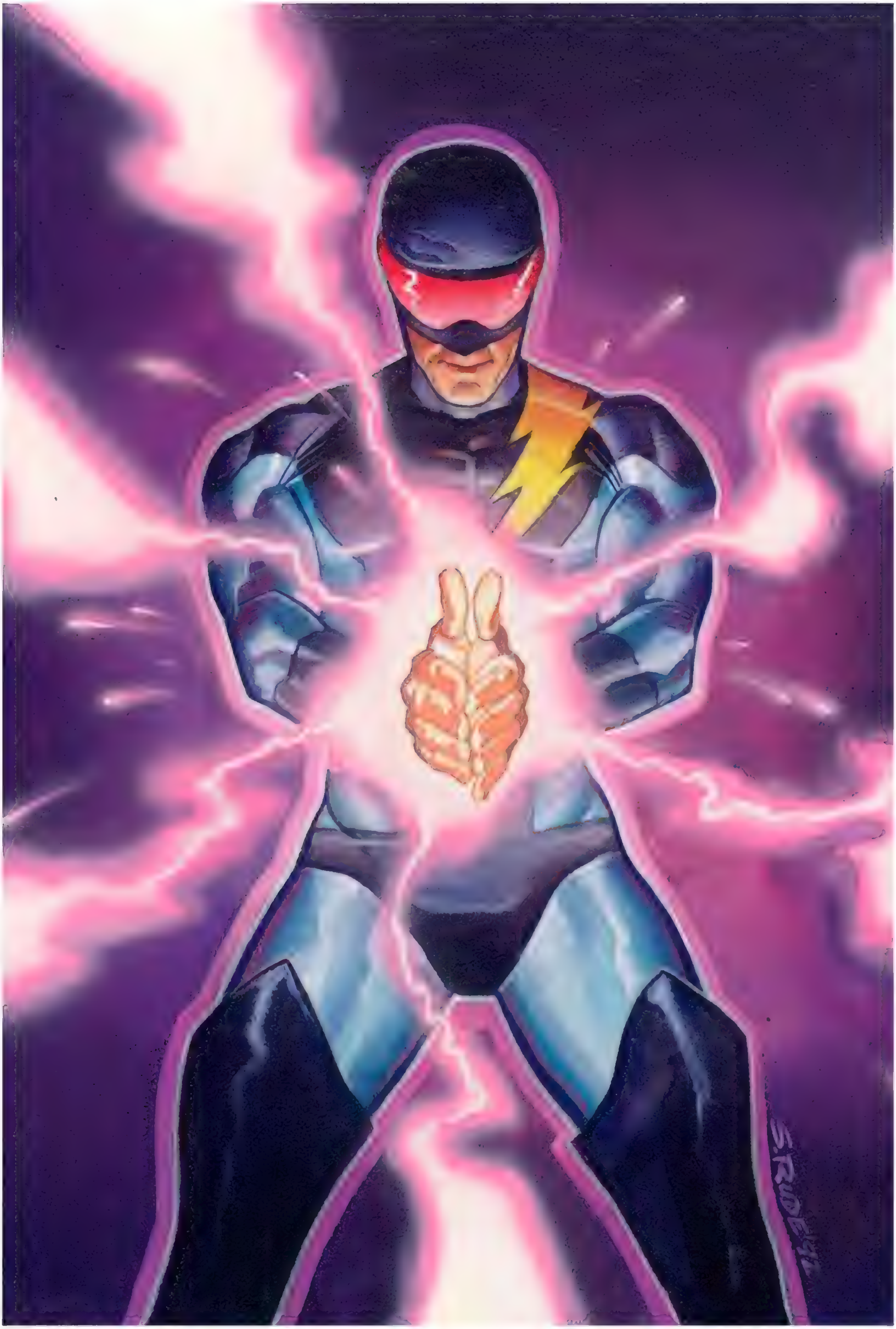
*A colour edition of the early **Nemesis** stories will be published by **2000 AD** later this year in two different versions: a limited 'Termight' edition with Torquemada on the cover; and a regular 'Deviant' edition with Nemesis on the front.*


S.RUDE'82

SPACE ODDITY

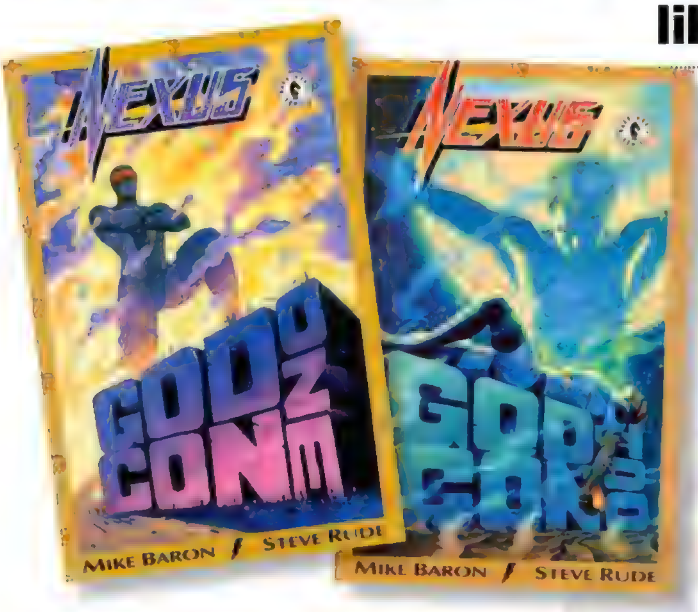
Nexus artist and co-creator Steve Rude on why the seminal '80s strip is the most rewarding he'll ever do... **By David Currie**

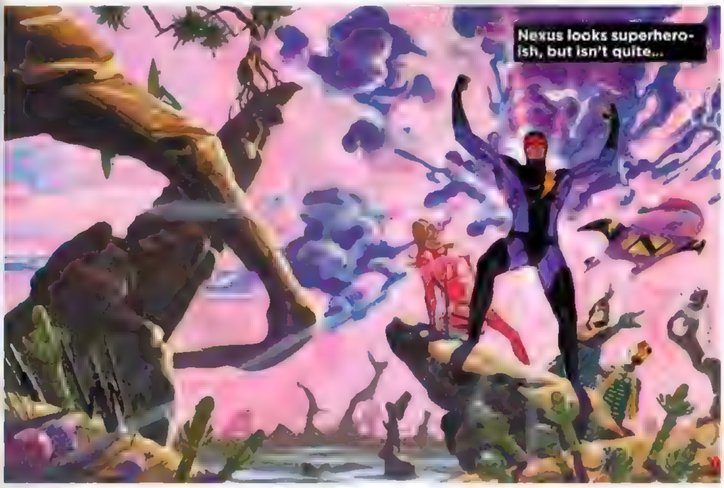
Despite being one of the truly great comic book artists, Steve 'the Dude' Rude has rather slipped off the radar of late – to the point where many younger fans have only vaguely heard the name, don't really know the work at all. His unique art – highly stylised, heavily retro and often crazily-detailed, yet at all times sleek and clean – has appeared infrequently in mainstream comics, instead earning most of its accolades and followers through a singular work of astonishing originality: *Nexus*.

A deep space adventure strip born in the independent publishing boom of the early '80s – and cradled in the infant days of the direct sales market, which led to the profusion of comic shops we see today – *Nexus* is a seminal sci-fi series, combining high drama and low comedy with often surprising levels of violence and complexity. Its hero – one Horatio Hellpop, would you believe? – dresses like a superhero but rarely acts like one; his look, you suspect, was the sugar designed to tempt an unsuspecting mainstream reader in...

As Nexus, Hellpop is force-fed nightmares from an alien being with a very loose grasp on sanity; a sort of self-appointed conscious of humanity. These dreams reveal the actions of mass-murderers across the galaxy – who, in order to stop this relentless parade through his head, Nexus is forced to seek out and execute. He operates from a moon orbiting a dead planet called Ylum, though, over the course of the series, this livens up rather a lot, Ylum becoming a refuge for myriad alien races fleeing oppression from across space.

> **“ They asked at school what we wanted to be. I said a cartoonist, like Charles M Schulz ”**




Nexus looks superhero-ish, but isn't quite...

ALIEN JUSTICE

The *Nexus* story is a complicated one, chock-full of bizarre happenings, real-world consequences, and oddball characters. Here's our potted guide...

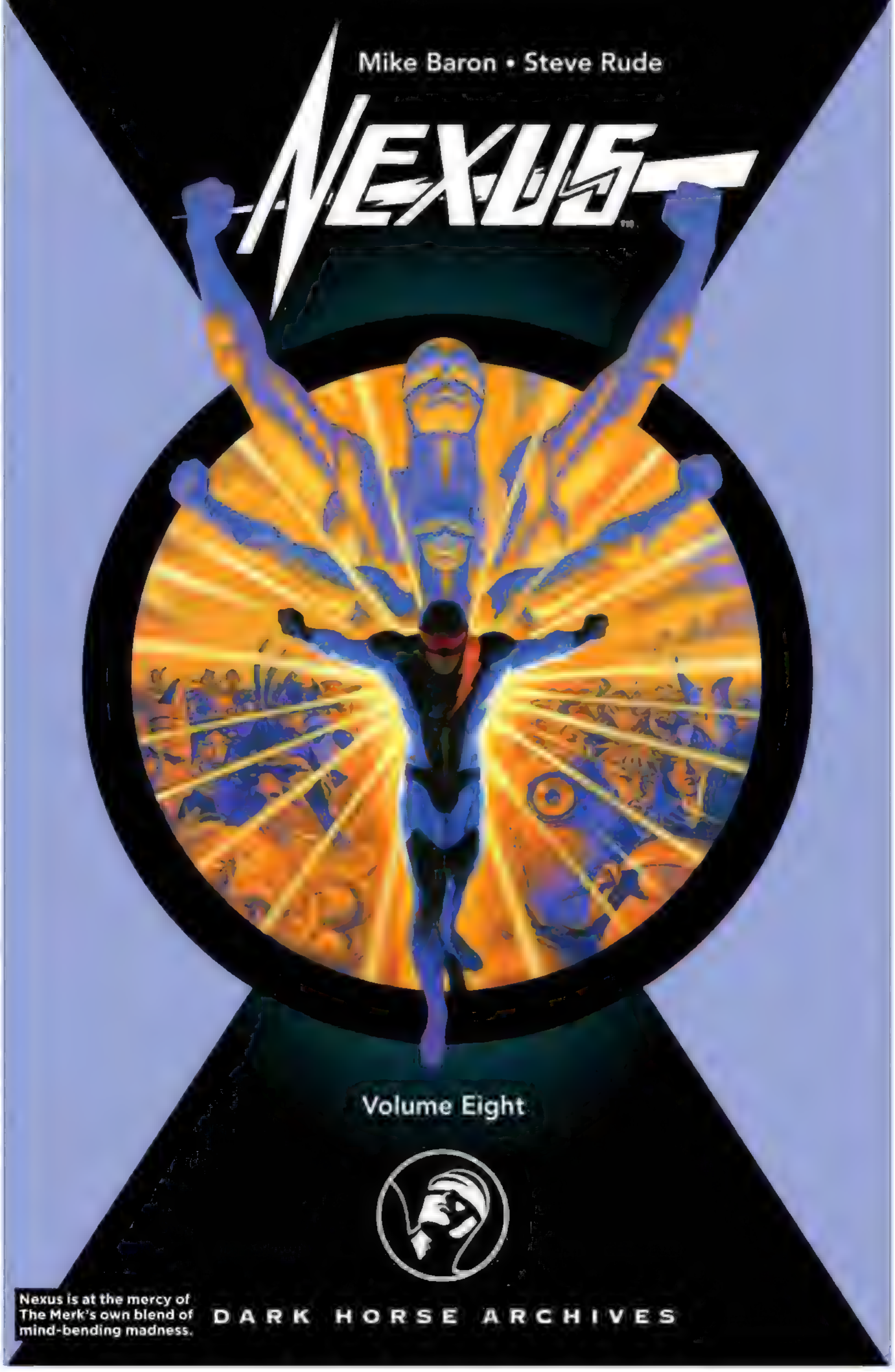
What is Nexus?
An indie science fiction strip, set in the deep space of the far future. Our hero, Horatio Valdemar Hellpop, gets his superpowers from powerful, manipulative, potentially insane alien The Merk; his job is to kill a certain number of human mass murderers per 'cycle' for reasons unknown. Horatio, now known as Nexus, is reluctant, but The Merk compels him through powerful dreams; meanwhile, our hero slowly gathers refugees to his lonely home on the moon Ylum (say 'eye-lum', for 'asylum'), and with them comes a vast cast of supporting characters, most of them tortured souls with their own vendettas. Slowly the mysteries of the universe, and some of what's really going on, are revealed...

Publishing history?
All over the shop. The initial series ran for 80 issues from the early '80s to 1991; through the '90s it returned as a series of seven annual(ish) miniseries; then, in 2007, as a new ongoing, starting with #99. Publishers were Capital Comics (other titles: *Badger*, *Whisper*) for the first three black-and-white issues and the following half dozen colour ones; then First Comics (*American Flagg!*, *Jon Sable*, *Dreadstar*) for the rest of the regular run. Dark Horse took over for the miniseries, Steve Rude self-published a few subsequent issues, and the property is now back at Dark Horse, where the collected *Nexus Archives* is a dozen volumes strong. There've been a few one-shots, crossovers (with the likes of *Madman* and *Magnus: Robot Fighter*) and companion titles along the way too.

Creative team?
Mike Baron has written almost every *Nexus* story; Steve Rude has drawn most of them, though everyone from Mike Mignola to Paul Smith has stood in for periods.

Awards?
Loads including six Eisner Awards, most of them for Rude's art.

What else has Steve Rude done?
His 2004 co-creation (with writer/inker Gary Martin) *The Moth* is a non-powered, circus-owning superhero; his work for Marvel and DC has tended towards retro interpretations of major icons such as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man and X-Men.



Nexus is at the mercy of The Merk's own blend of mind-bending madness.

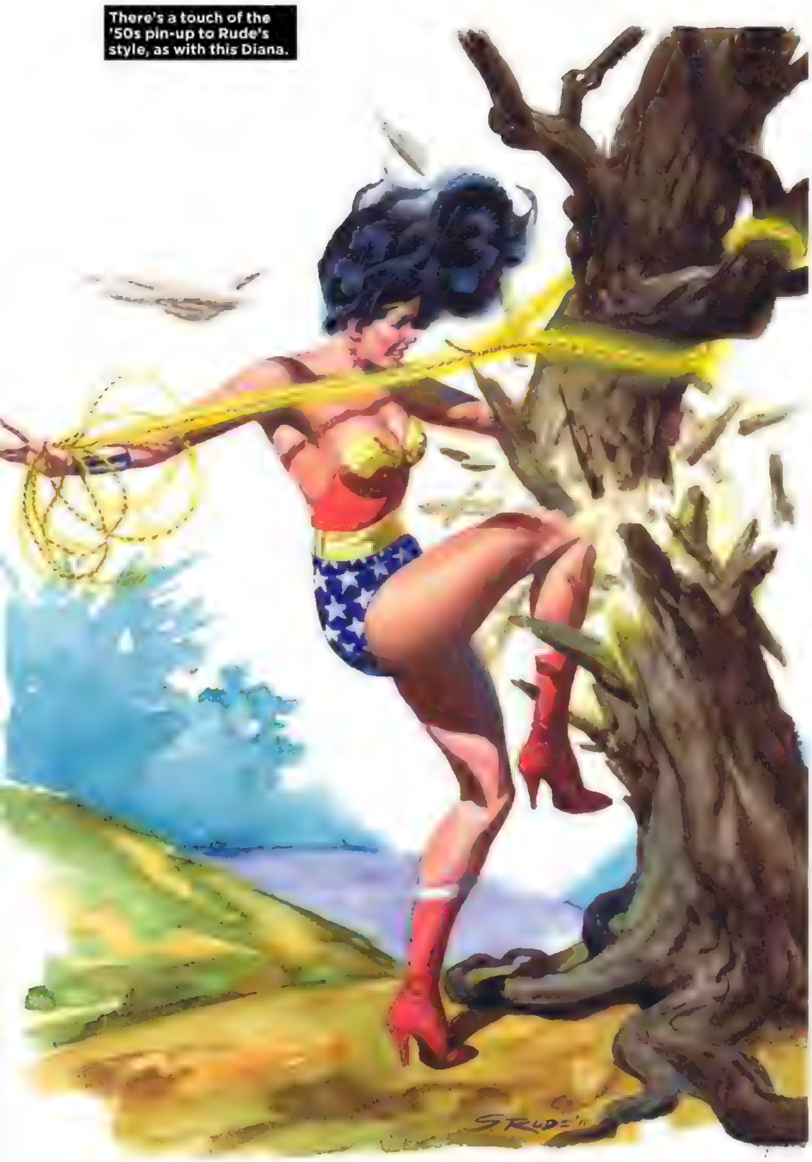
Created by Rude with writer Mike Baron, *Nexus* moved from black-and-white to colour fairly quickly, but the status quo has rarely remained stable for long – other artists have contributed, the story's backdrop and emphasis has been ever-changing, and the strip itself has bounced from publisher to publisher across its 30-year history, finally finding its current home with Dark Horse Comics. The result? All the past series collected in soft and hardcover editions both, and now some new stories too.

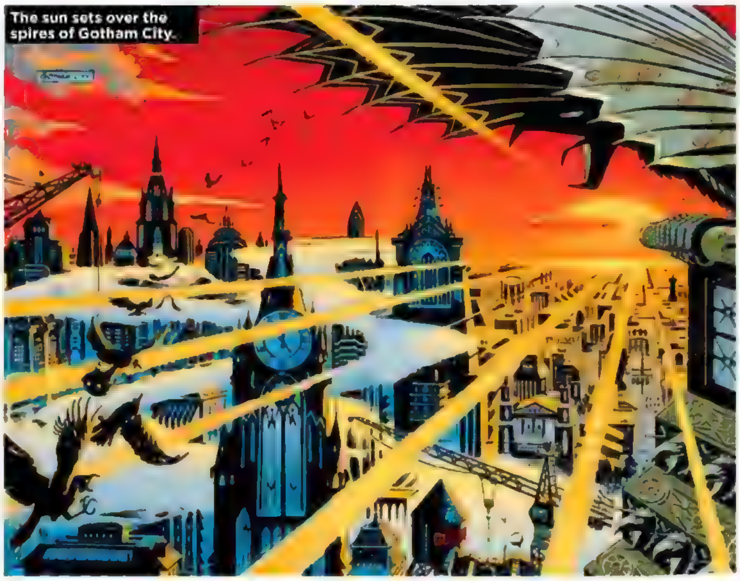
It's been a rocky ride, but *Nexus* is both one of the all-time great space heroes, and a shining example of creative vision triumphing over all...

Comic Heroes: Nexus had issues with his parents – the first murderer he killed was his own father! – but your childhood was somewhat different...
Steve Rude: Oh, my childhood memories are idyllic and wonderful! Particularly so of the year 1966, with the debuts of *Space Ghost* and the original *Star Trek*, and Jack Kirby's Marvel career at his absolute apex too. I can't recall my earliest memory, but it could've been of the beautiful white snow drifts in my hometown of Madison, Wisconsin.

CH: You picked up the pencil very young?
SR: I remember drawing dinosaurs in kindergarten. My dad and I would have contests to see who could do the best animal – my favourites were always cheetahs and peregrine falcons. At school they asked the class to fill out a 'What I'll be doing in 20 years' assignment, and I put that I wanted to be a cartoonist, like Charles M Schulz. I backed this up with my original Eggbird cartoon – a character who, much later, began showing up as a round, orange bird in Nexus.

CH: It's easy to see the influence of classic Silver Age comics in your work...
SR: Jack Kirby always had the greatest impact on me, but I also very much enjoyed Alex Toth's layouts on *Space Ghost*, and the compelling stories in *Magnus: Robot Fighter* by Russ Manning, with its believability and exciting art. I met Jack numerous times and have uniformly wonderful memories of him;


There's a touch of the '50s pin-up to Rude's style, as with this Diana.


The sun sets over the spires of Gotham City.

BROADWAY BILL DOES IT AGAIN!
NEXT!

not a day goes by when I'm not thinking about Jack Kirby in some way or other too.

CH: The thing you're best known for, of course, is *Nexus*. How did you first meet writer and co-creator Mike Baron?
SR: It was on the steps of the Memorial Union Building in Madison in 1979. I was 23, and Baron was probably 30. We had a brief – as always! – 15-minute talk on that sunny summer day to discuss an idea Baron had called 'Encyclopaedia Salesman', the story of a 19-year-old kid having to go door-to-door selling encyclopaedias in a post-holocaust future; I drew on my actual experiences of selling Kirby vacuum cleaners as a teenager when illustrating it!

I'd been attempting to sell my strips to the Madison Press Connection, a weekly newspaper, and they'd put us in touch. Baron was always business-like and to-the-point – and still is! He's always been 'steady' to my 'up and down'.

CH: Did he have the basic concept of *Nexus* in his pocket at that time?
SR: Not at first. After I spent almost a year drawing, inking and lettering *Encyclopaedia*, Baron and I did a couple of one-pagers as hopeful submissions to *Heavy Metal* magazine, who were paying $1,000 a page. After that fizzled, and knowing that superheroes were the only sure sell, Baron eventually came up with the superhero angle to *Nexus*.

Ironically, Baron once mentioned to me that he was never really comfortable doing superheroes – not nearly as much as I was – and he wanted to do something more along the lines of the reality-based paperback fiction of the time. Of course, thanks to his expertise writing any subject, he simply added those themes to our *Nexus* stories.

> **" Having to make stressful monthly deadlines was a true sink or swim time "**

CH: And now you had to find a publisher...
SR: A couple of local guys called Milt and John, who ran a comic distribution outfit, were willing to try their hand at the independent publishing game after a friend of Baron's, Steve Sutta, pulled out. He'd figured how expensive it would be and changed his mind – so we ended up making Sutta a villain in *Nexus*! By this point, of course, Baron already had the fully-formed idea in his head: the main themes, the moon Nexus lived on, the mystery of the Merk, and most of the supporting characters, like Dave and Giz. Sundra came into the picture quickly thereafter, as the spy and girlfriend she would eventually become. I originally thought of Sundra as a 'blonde Hawaiian' – probably due to some movie about island girls I'd been transfixed by at the time. She was my approximation of the most beautiful girl I could imagine.

CH: And Nexus himself...?
SR: My earliest sketches of him were drawn one night in Baron's apartment during the freezing cold of a Wisconsin winter; I remember Baron only adding to the discomfort by keeping the inside of his apartment a few fractions below the temperature outside. Nexus always had the red visor and the

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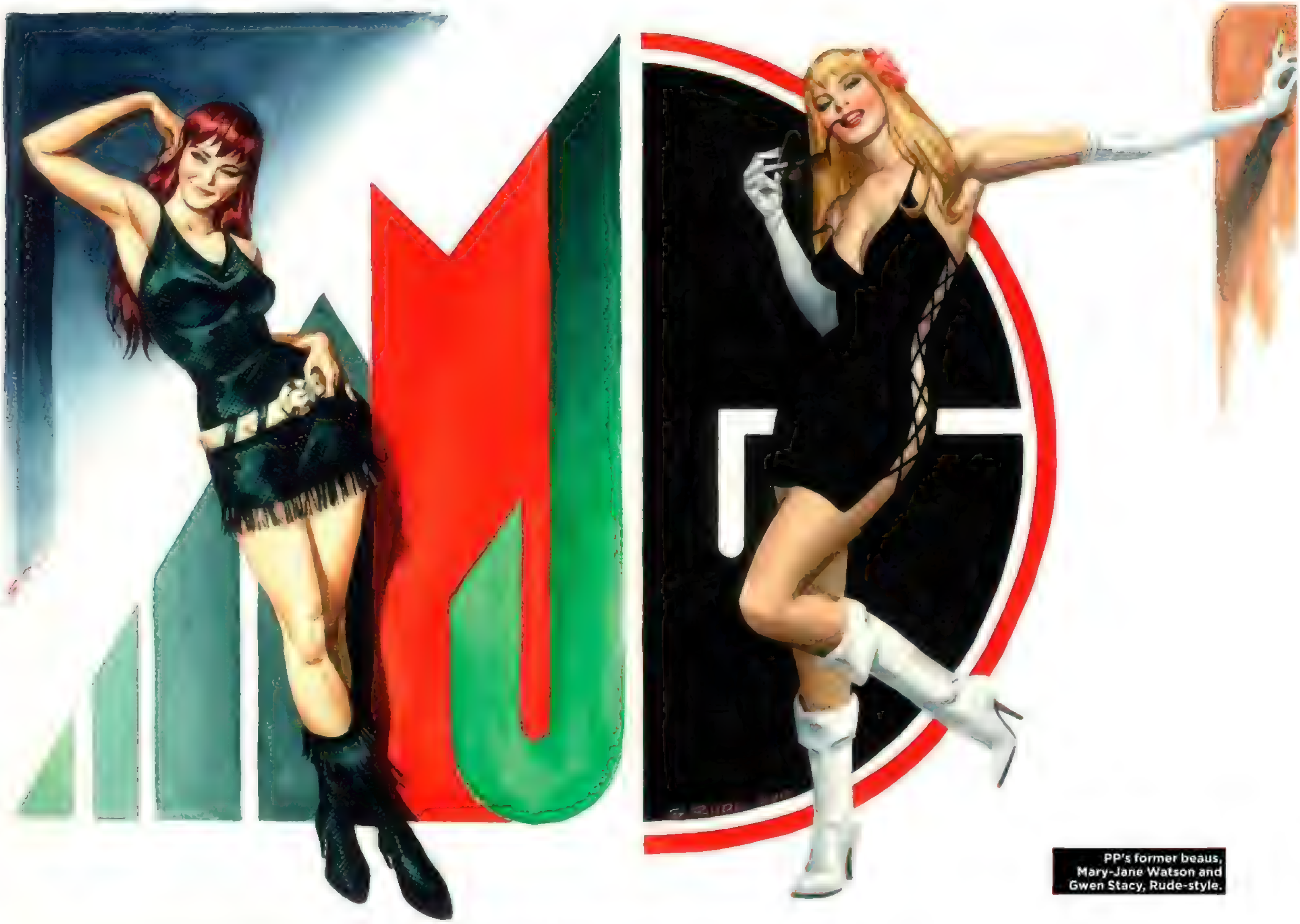


PP's former beaus, Mary-Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy, Rude-style.

> **“ If the *Nexus* movie ever gets made, I'd probably pick Joss Whedon to direct ”**

lightning bolt – both Baron concepts – but I probably came up with the streamlined jock-strap look, the knee boots and the fingerless gloves, which developed from the simple necessity of having to see him throw his energy blasts.

CH: The publishing history has been sporadic, of course…

SR: The first black-and-white *Nexus* series was from Milt and John's Capital Comics in 1981; one of their best ideas was to hire a local designer, Rich Bruning, to handle the editorial duties from his downtown studio. Rich was a superb editor, it turned out, and professional from the get-go.

CH: How did you persuade Paul Gulacy, then riding high with *Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu* at Marvel, to illustrate the covers for this initial series?

SR: 'The Big G', as I came to call him, was my artistic idol at the time: I saw his drawing and storytelling on *Master Of Kung Fu* as the absolute end-all of what one could aspire to. He drew the first covers as a favour to me, and I can't talk highly enough about him. In person Paul can be an eccentric character at times, but he's still one of my best buds – and I'll never forget the debt I owe him. The detail and infinite care he put into his *MOKF* work has been an unending influence on me.

CH: Did you seek advice from other professional artists at the time?

SR: Neal Adams was another pro who selflessly gave his time and advice to the young Steve Rude, which helped me immensely in improving my work.

I'd travelled to New York in 1978, trying to pitch my work to Marvel, DC and Warren. Marvel was run by Jim Shooter at the time, and the hour I spent with him was very rewarding, filled with solid advice – though, when someone showed me his blog recollections of meeting me during that time, I found them strangely distorted and mean-spirited.

The people at DC were always very cordial and generous with their time too, and, although I never made it to Warren, so was John Workman at *Heavy Metal*.

CH: So *Nexus* is now finally in print, and earning great reviews. Did you feel you'd arrived at last?

SR: When I started working for First Publishing, the next *Nexus* publisher, I guess there was a sense of arriving. First wasn't Marvel, where Stan and Jack and the Big G worked, but it was where it was all happening at the time. But what I missed most when we went from Capital to First was the more intimate sense of design and production. At First it became much more assembly-line: they wanted their books out on time, and promised to throat-cut the first person who messed that up.

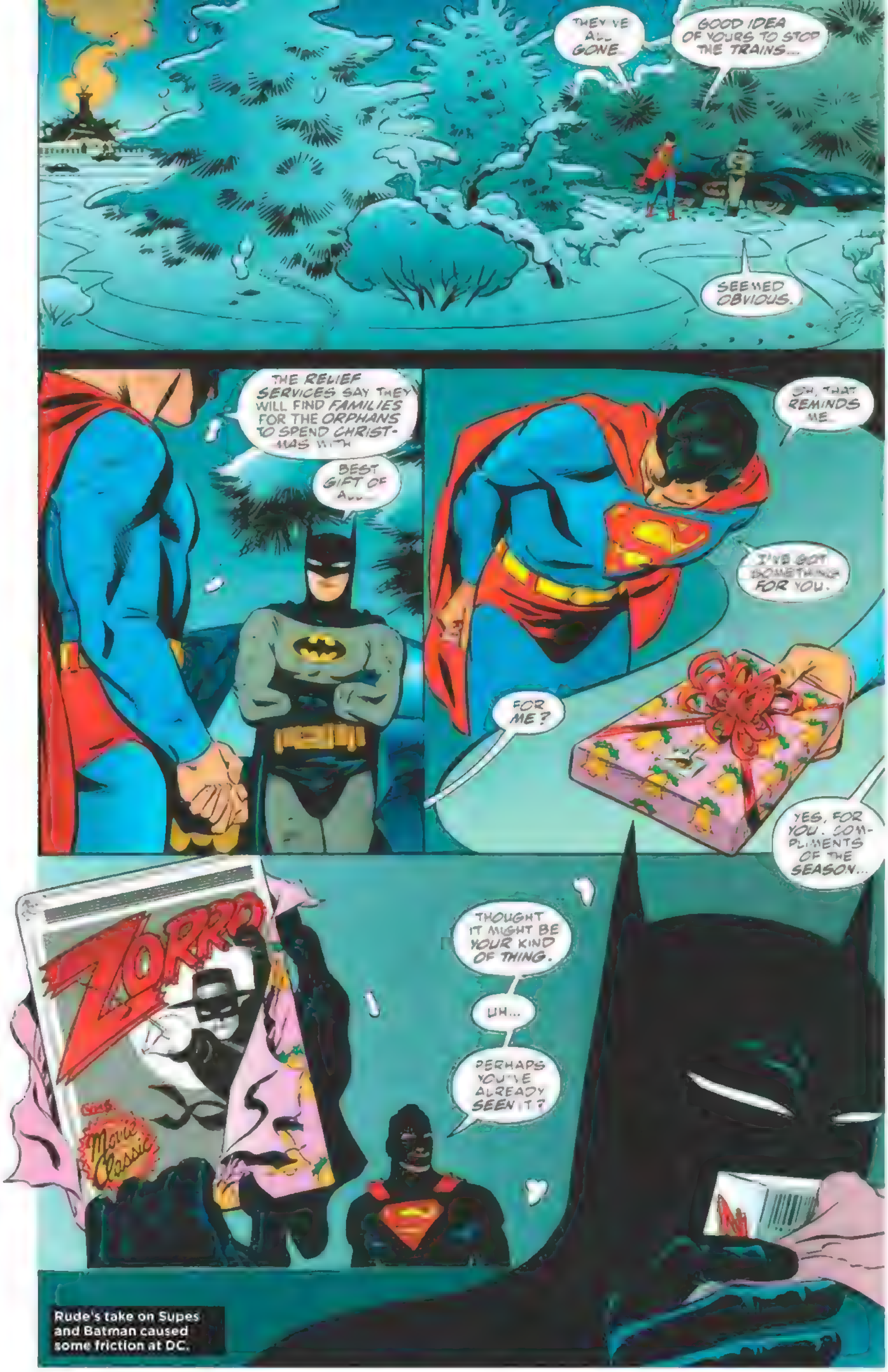
Certainly, I always seemed to be straddling the deadline edge with them; when I called my editor at First, Rick Oliver, to tell him I was running behind, he was near ready to kill me. Having to make those stressful monthly deadlines was a true sink or swim time – so it's a good thing I had no life, except for work and girlfriends.

Looking back, I'd probably reached the apex of my artistic development by *Nexus* #50. Everyone has a moment where they peak artistically, and that was probably mine.

CH: Is it true that Dark Horse actually returned the rights to you and Mike Baron when they started to publish the series in the '90s?

SR: Yes. First dissolved, and *Nexus* was bought by Dark Horse; shortly thereafter, publisher Mike Richardson returned the rights. It was a fairly unprecedented act! Certainly, with editorial despots like Martin Goodman, Bob Kanigher or Mort Weisinger, such a move would've been considered unthinkable – and probably awarded with a mandatory prison sentence!

CH: In more recent years you formed your own publishing company to put out *Nexus*, called Rude Dude Productions. How was all that for you?


THEY'VE ALL GONE.
GOOD IDEA OF YOURS TO STOP THE TRAINS...
SEEMED OBVIOUS.
THE RELIEF SERVICES SAY THEY WILL FIND FAMILIES FOR THE ORPHANS TO SPEND CHRISTMAS WITH
BEST GIFT OF ALL...
OH, THAT REMINDS ME.
I'VE GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU.
FOR ME?
YES, FOR YOU. COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON...
ZORRO
Movie Classic
THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE YOUR KIND OF THING.
UH...
PERHAPS YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN IT?

Rude's take on Supes and Batman caused some friction at DC.

SR: The people who know me best probably realise that being publisher of Rude Dude was both rewarding and frustrating to my simple brain. The business side is something I'm not really suited to – but it was important that I try.

Still, the hassle of having to continually raise money to support the publishing side was always an inescapable pain in the butt. Now that I'm working for Dark Horse again those burdens have been lifted, and I'm much happier. Their relaxed deadline pace and editorial assists suit me much better.

I'd enjoyed a recent sojourn into the fine art world, but Mike Richardson asked me to come back to draw *Nexus*, which is currently running in eight-page instalments in *Dark Horse Presents.*

CH: Do you have a personal favourite among all the *Nexus* stories you and Baron created?
SR: My all-time favourite *Nexus* story is probably #26 of the First series, a tale entitled 'Clayborn'. I was living in Madison back then, and remember Baron dropping off the script when I met him downtown one afternoon. After we parted I walked to the local sub shop to read it – and it sent chilling reverberations all through my head and heart. Baron had really outdone himself; that story was truly scary.

Probably my favourite thing we published recently, however, was the Sundra story from the Rude Dude line. This was the first – and only! – fully-painted story I'd ever done in comics. It was only 11 pages long, but it took seven months to complete. My wife, Jaynelle, said it was one of the things that helped sink my publishing career!

“*Nexus* is the most personal and, therefore, most rewarding work I'll probably ever do”

CH: And how about from the cast, vast as it is by usual comic book standards...?
SR: Other than Horatio himself, my favourite character in *Nexus* has always been Sundra Peale, my all-American Marilyn Monroe-style beauty – she just pips Dave from Thune, our Horatio counterpart in wise and logical counsel. Generally, I like the nice people, like Lonnie Loomis, and hate the mean people, like Ursula Imada – who, due to her showdown with Sunny-honey in the story 'Soap Opera #2', has exited our pages forever.

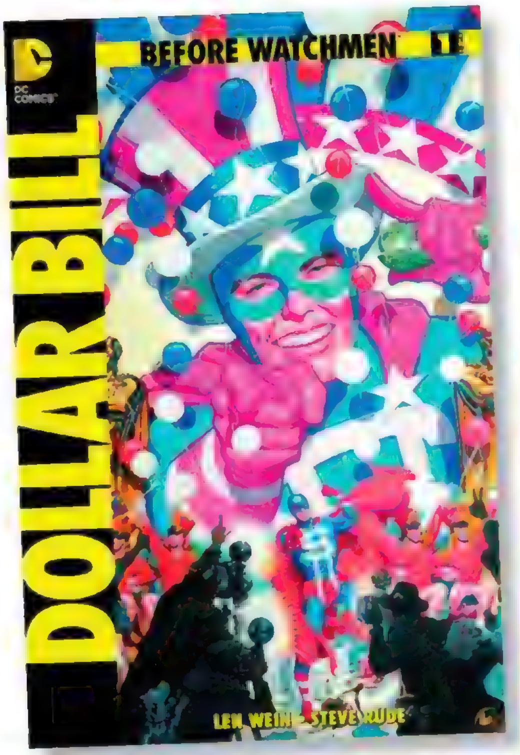
CH: Right now, what does the future for *Nexus* look like?
SR: I think it has great promise. We have to please ourselves first; beyond that, the readers will let us know how we do. If the *Nexus* movie ever gets made I'd probably pick Joss Whedon to direct, and though I don't know who I'd currently choose to play Sundra, years ago I had a thing for Penelope Ann Miller. Ben Affleck would make an admirable Horatio/Nexus type.

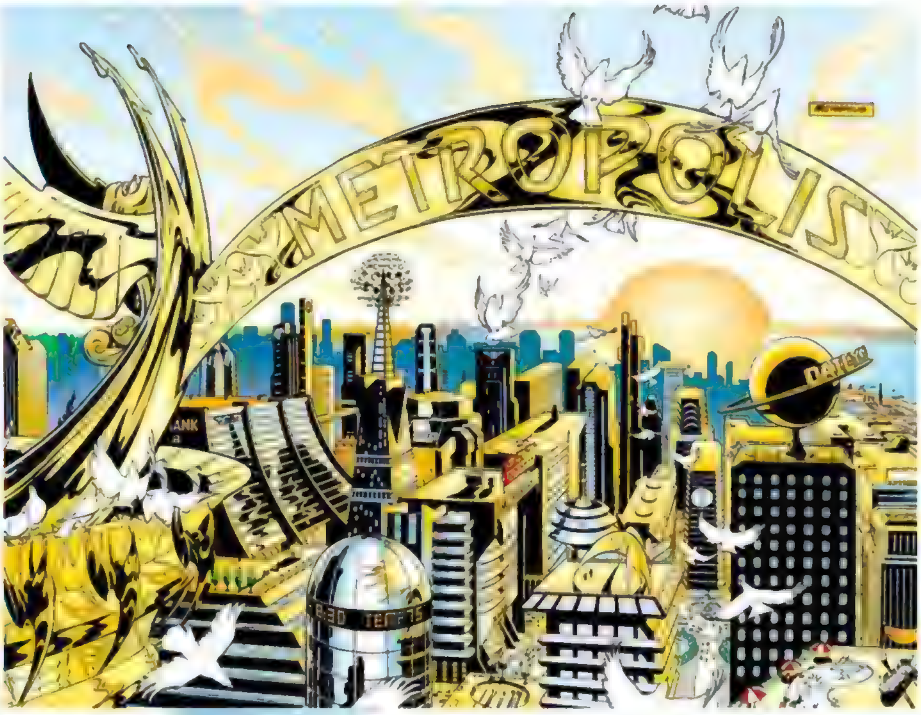
CH: You departed *Nexus* for a spell in the '90s working for the Big Two, beginning with an insanely-detailed three-issue prestige series for DC called *World's Finest*. How was it working for the majors for the first time?
SR: For the most part, I remember the initial butting of heads, with Dick Giordano and Rich Bruning – my former editor at Capitol Comics! – telling me how they didn't like my renditions of Superman and Batman. I'd wanted to do the original Shuster Superman, and the Bob Kane Batman with the very different ears. I'm still in disagreement with them over that.

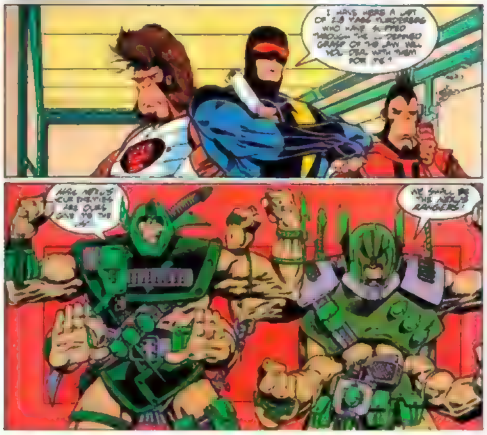
Other than that, working with writer Dave Gibbons was wonderful, and drawing those 48-page issues was an exercise in seeing how much storytelling detail I could put into each panel. I spent a lot of time doing what I call 'field research' – climbing up seven-storey buildings to see what the stuff on rooftops really looked like; sketching the different kinds of hubcaps on cars and buses. It was endless, but that was the way I'd trained myself as an illustrator – go to the source. Looking back, there is much I could have streamlined.

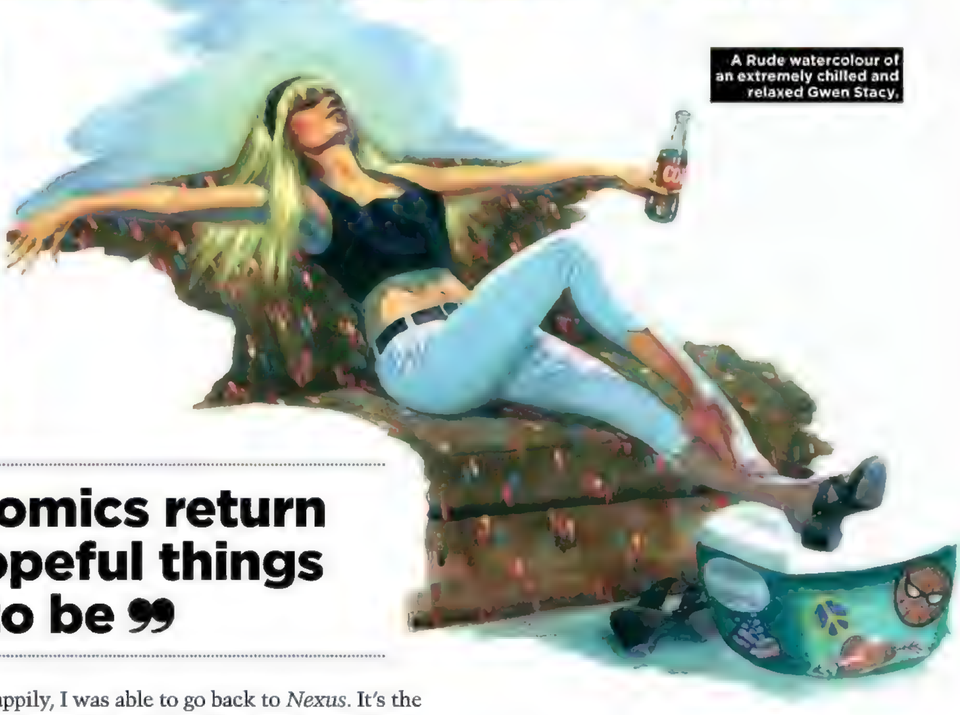
CH: From the end of the '90s onwards *Nexus* was on hiatus, and you drew a number of series for Marvel. The art was fantastically retro, and you channelled Kirby like no one before or since. But you didn't get on well with the editors there, by some accounts...
SR: My first work for Marvel goes back a few years before that, but mostly it began with Glenn Greenberg, one of Marvel's more positive and enthusiastic editors, asking me to work on *Hulk vs Superman*, a DC/Marvel co-production.

Glenn had wanted Stan Lee to script this story originally, but when I found out I was to draw an entire 48-page book from Stan's »






WE SHALL BE THE NEW RANGERS!


A Rude watercolour of an extremely chilled and relaxed Gwen Stacy.

> “I hope to see comics return to the fun and hopeful things they used to be”

single, bare-bones paragraph, I got a little worried! So a new writer was brought on board to provide me with a full script, and from there things progressed to miniseries starring the X-Men, Spider-Man, Thor and Captain America.

Sales-wise, the most successful were probably the first two books – *Hulk/Superman* and *X-Men* – though working on the Spider-Man books gave me the most fun and fulfilment. I loved being one of the few artists to deliberately bring the Romita style back to the character, since John Romita was always my favourite Spidey artist.

Glenn Greenberg and Ralph Macchio were far and away my two favourite editors there, but I'll never forget an assistant editor on *Thor* insisting that page numbers in comics aren't needed anymore. I wanted to send in my pencils without page numbers to see how he dealt with that! Suffocating and needless editorial meddling is no one's idea of a good time, and after fairly bad experience on *Captain America* it was time to move on.

Happily, I was able to go back to *Nexus*. It's the most personal and, therefore, most rewarding work I'll probably ever do.

CH: Tell us about your working practices. How fast do you draw, for instance?

SR: My average drawing time is about a page a day, and – if I have the energy left – maybe doing the breakdown pencils for the next page too. For a cover, which I usually paint, I always begin with a small colour thumbnail rough, and then shoot various reference photos.

CH: How does the future of comics look to you right now?

SR: I hope to see them coming down off their decades-long dark and morbid perch to return to the fun and hopeful things they used to be. And I'm happy that the industry still finds time to call me at fairly regular intervals to do work for them!

The only thing I haven't done that I'd really like to is Kirby's *New Gods* – or one of his other DC books. I'd enjoy *OMAC*, or perhaps a book featuring Big Barda and the Female Furies, but so far DC has indicated no interest in that whatsoever.

They did, however, recently call me about a *Before Watchmen* one-shot featuring Dollar Bill. I wasn't sure how to react at first, not being very familiar with this relaunch of the *Watchmen* titles, although I did have the advantage of drawing the character before, on the variant cover to *Minuteman* #4.

Eventually, however, I did the pencils, inks and lettering for the book – and it was so much fun to be teamed with the great writer, Len Wein. Since Len and I are both from the classic period of comic storytelling we had a great time – and it shows! CH

The Dollar Bill one-shot is out now. Steve is still doing commissions; contact him at steverude.com

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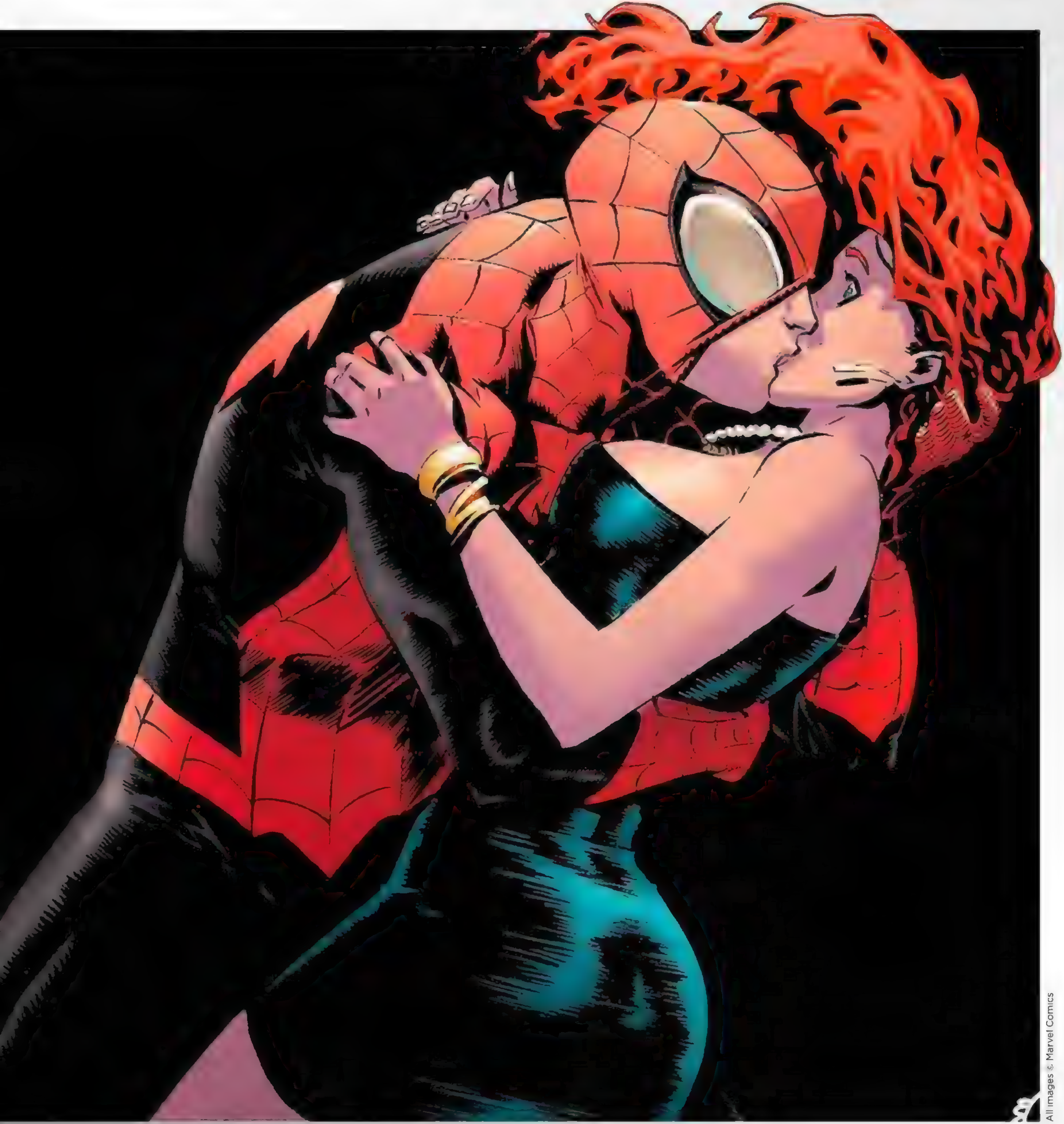
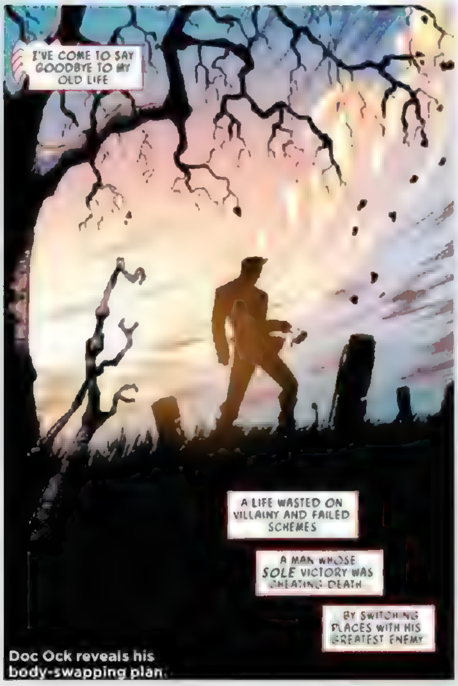
CRAZY EIGHT

Dan Slott's been writing *Spider-Man* for years, but it's only lately – as the character's chief scribe, and with such landmarks as the *Superior Spider-Man* relaunch under his belt – that he feels he's made the character his own. And how? By swapping 'our' eight-legged beastie for a rather more dangerous variety…

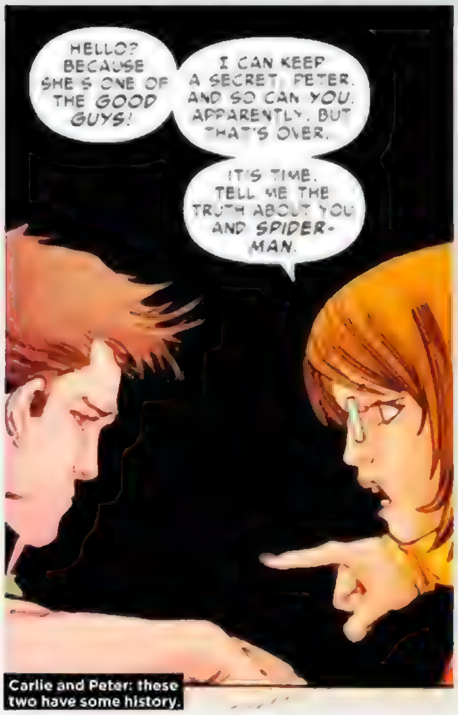
By Stephen Jewell



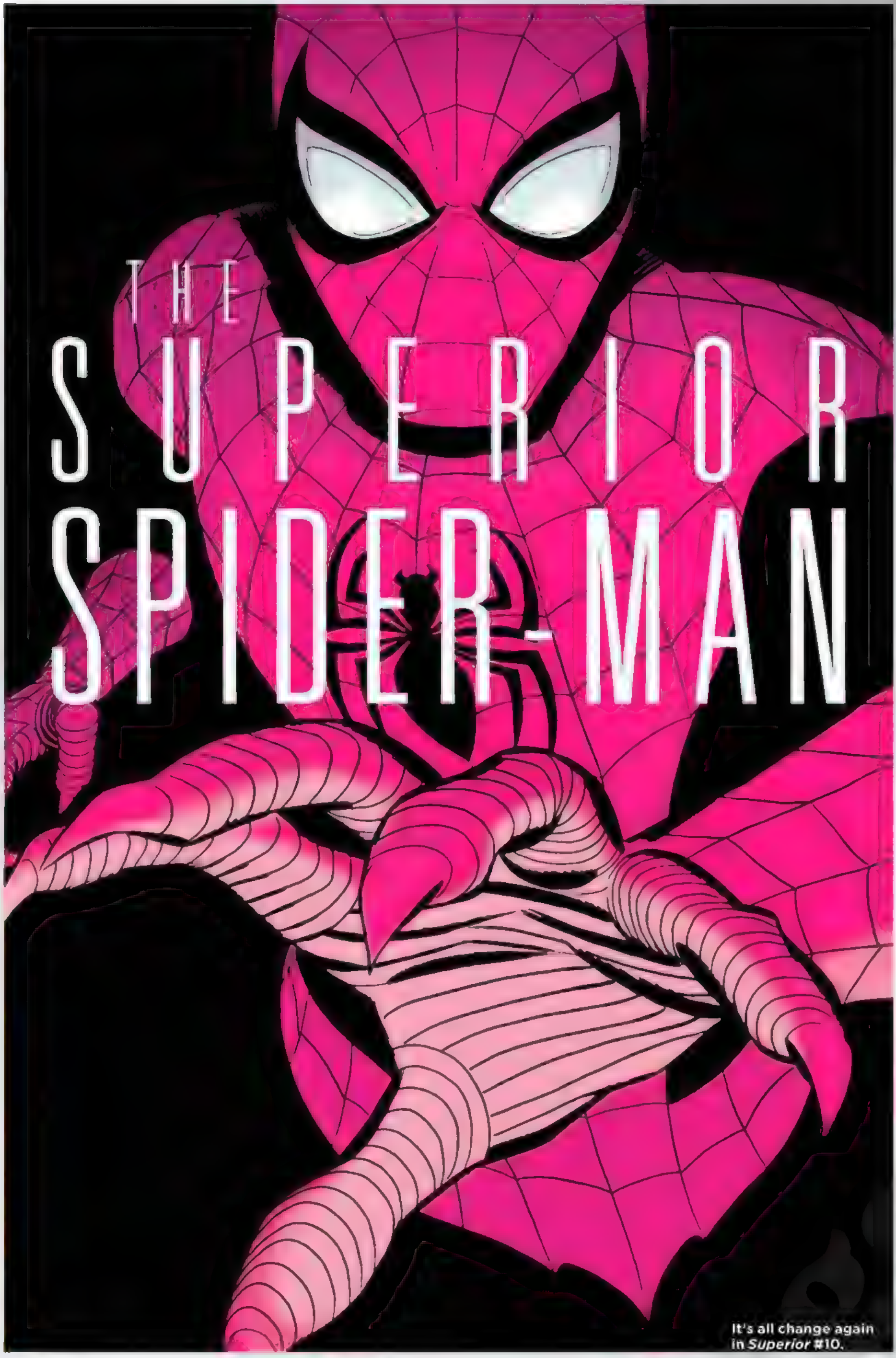
All images © Marvel Comics


I'VE COME TO SAY GOODBYE TO MY OLD LIFE
A LIFE WASTED ON VILLAINY AND FAILED SCHEMES
A MAN WHOSE SOLE VICTORY WAS CHEATING DEATH
BY SWITCHING PLACES WITH HIS GREATEST ENEMY

Doc Ock reveals his body-swapping plan.


HELLO? BECAUSE SHE'S ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS!
I CAN KEEP A SECRET, PETER. AND SO CAN YOU, APPARENTLY. BUT THAT'S OVER.
IT'S TIME. TELL ME THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU AND SPIDER-MAN.

Carlie and Peter: these two have some history.


THE
SUPERIOR
SPIDER-MAN

It's all change again in *Superior* #10.

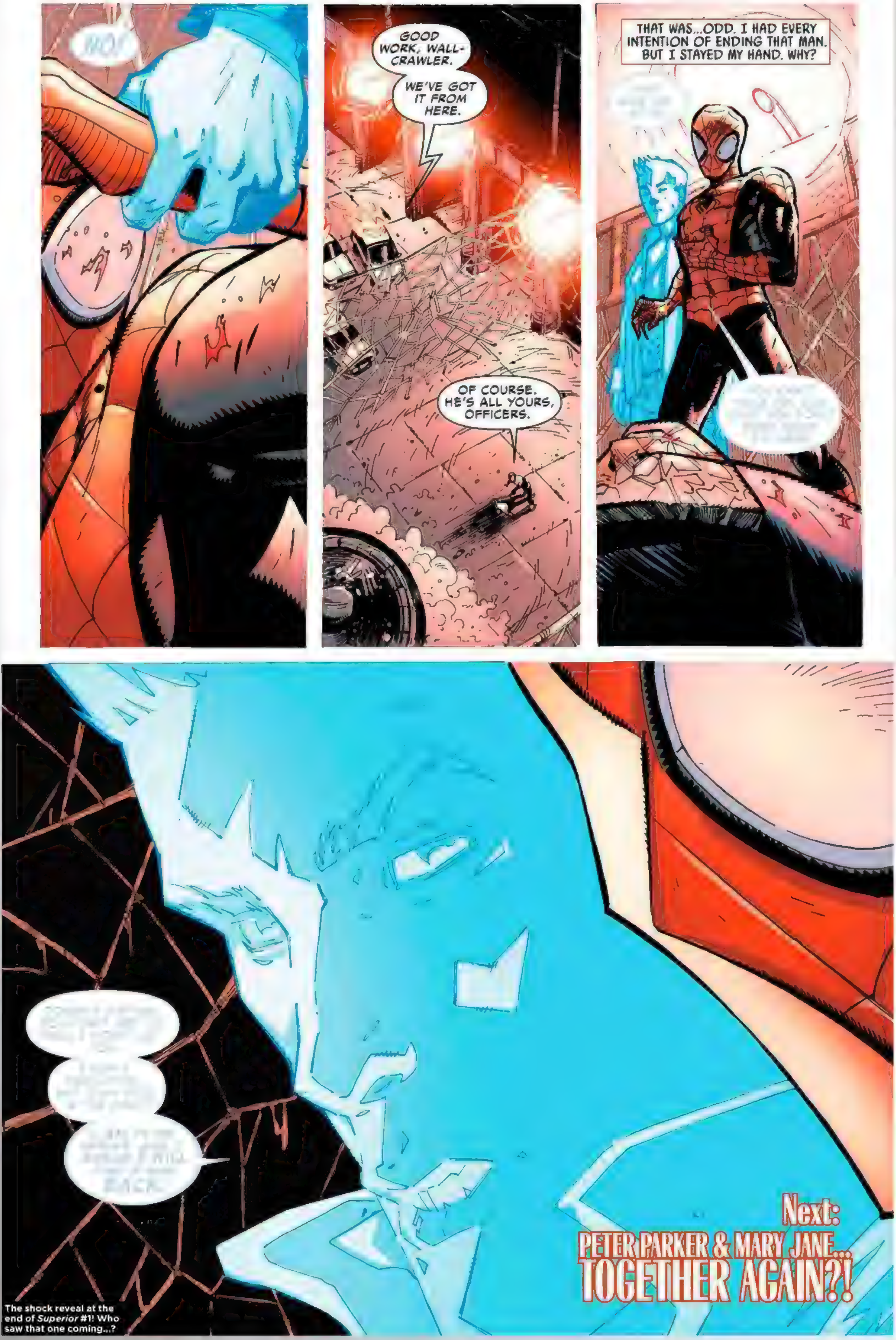
> **“We were smacking the hornet's nest with #700 – there were a lot of angry and upset fans”**

From the dramatic assassination of Captain America to the Human Torch bravely sacrificing himself in the Negative Zone, few things capture the comic-reading imagination more than the death of an iconic superhero – even if we are all cynical old so-and-sos by this point, painfully aware that the good guy will inevitably make a spectacular rise from the dead somewhere down the line. (The only real question is whether it will be a few months or – should the creators really hold their nerve – a few years later, and which particular get-out-of-jail-free card will be pressed into service this time.)

You'd think that shocking the audience would have become quite tricky, then, but there are still ways and means – as ably demonstrated by the sensational controversy that erupted after Peter Parker's recent demise, Spider-Man himself appearing to breathe his last in Christmas 2012's special (and final!) *Amazing Spider-Man* #700 anniversary issue.

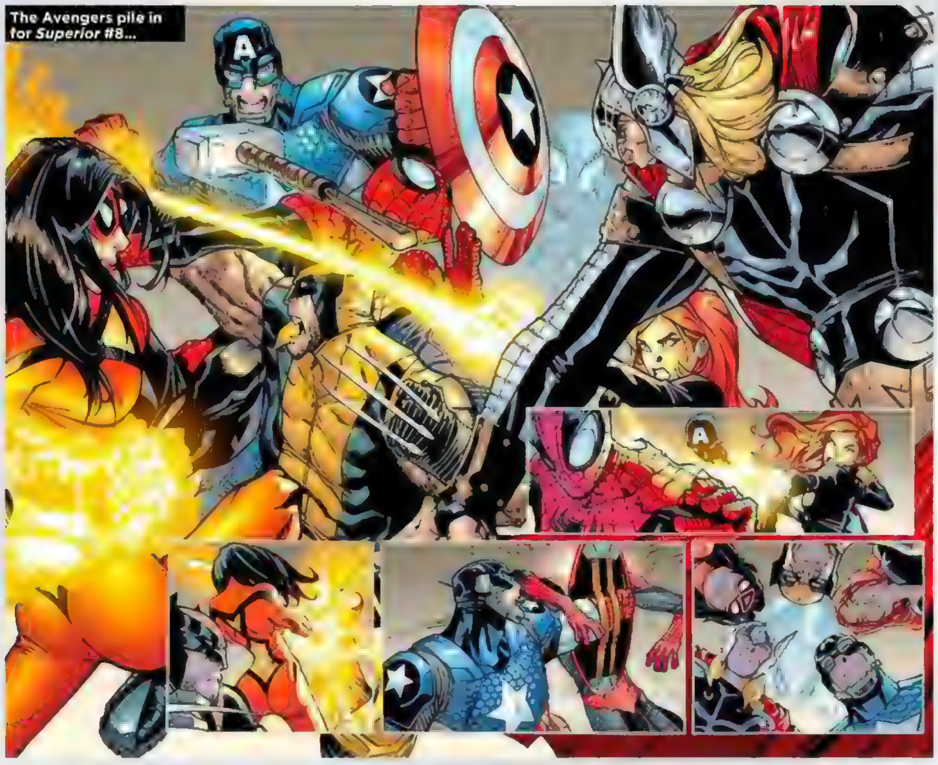
Foreshadowed earlier that month in *Amazing Spider-Man* #698, twist was heaped upon twist when it was revealed that a terminally ill Doctor Octopus had actually swapped bodies with everyone's favourite webhead some time ago, so when Peter apparently perishes in Doc Ock's bedridden body, Otto Octavius is left to assume the Spider-Man mantle. Lacking the annoying retro-fitted nature of the Gwen Stacy/Green Goblin revelations of a few years back – but similarly popcorn dropping nonetheless – this mad status quo became the backbone of the new, replacement *Superior Spider-Man* title. How will Ock handle it? Will he turn over a new leaf? And – oh dear – is Mary Jane now in for some inadvertent middle-aged villain lovin' too? (And ditto Aunt May – the mind is boggling at this point.)

The questions were legion, but Slott had saved one last curveball for the gob-smacking final page of *Superior Spider-Man* #1. Now »

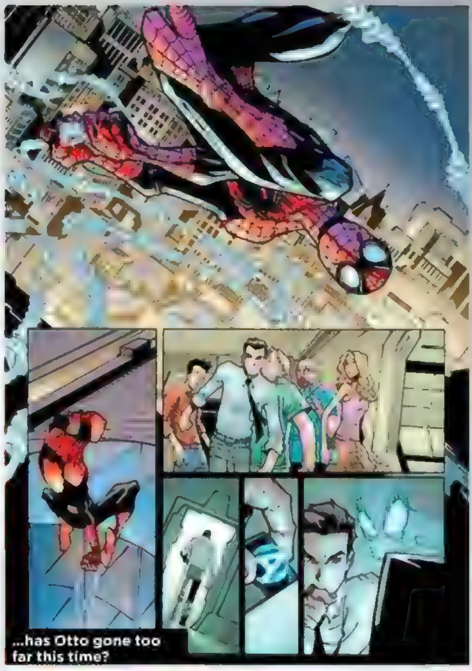

NO!
GOOD WORK, WALL-CRAWLER.
WE'VE GOT IT FROM HERE.
OF COURSE. HE'S ALL YOURS, OFFICERS.
THAT WAS...ODD. I HAD EVERY INTENTION OF ENDING THAT MAN. BUT I STAYED MY HAND. WHY?
BACK.

The shock reveal at the end of *Superior* #1! Who saw that one coming...?

Next:
PETER PARKER & MARY JANE...
TOGETHER AGAIN?!



The Avengers pile in for *Superior* #8...



...has Otto gone too far this time?

“I’m happy that we took everyone’s jaded expectations and flipped them”

Peter’s restless spirit has returned to haunt his one-time arch-nemesis – and ensure that he doesn’t put a step wrong in his new role...

In town for London Super Comic Con, Slott was overwhelmed by the rapturous reception that he received from British fans, with nearly 1,000 of them patiently queuing for a couple of hours just to get his signature and shake his hand. Not that the New York-based scribe was willing to take much of the credit.

“Ever since I joined *Spider-Man* I’ve had good sized crowds at all the shows,” he says when *Comic Heroes* catches up with him a little later. “Normally at any major convention, I’ll stay up to an extra hour after my shift, just to keep signing. But I’m fully aware that it’s down to Spider-Man, not me – with the big storylines we’ve done lately, it’s gotten somewhat out of control.”

Comic Heroes: You’ve clearly been enjoying the reaction to the big Doc Ock storyline, and the launch of *Superior Spider-Man*...

Dan Slott: It’s been pretty crazy! But we knew we were kind of smacking the hornet’s nest with a stick with #700, as there were a lot of fans that were going to be upset and angry. At the same time, however, we knew that by the time they got to the end of *Superior Spider-Man* #1 that it would all go away, and that’s exactly what happened. But – that said – I still don’t think we realised how much of a reaction #700 was going to get.

CH: Was it a long time in the planning?

DS: From my end, all the way back to *Amazing Spider-Man* #600 – so yes, it was literally 100 issues in the making.

CH: The great thing about #698’s shocking revelation was that, if you re-read many of the previous issues, it makes total sense – and you now see many of the things that happened in a very different light.

DS: Oh, it was all great fun to do – especially when we did the initial reveal in #698. If you read the ‘Big Time’ run, you’ll notice that there are a number of places where the brain helmet – or some of the technology that Doc Ock used in #600 – pops up. Spider-Man uses it in at least two places, once in ‘Spider Island’ and once in ‘Ends Of The Earth’. And there are a few other clues, such as the things that Madame Web says when she predicts the future, too. There are all kinds of little breadcrumbs and puzzle pieces that lead you up to #700.

CH: From Jean Grey to Johnny Storm, we all know that deceased superheroes don’t stay dead forever – so are storylines like this getting increasingly difficult to pull off, and still make genuinely exciting...?

DS: I’m lucky enough to have been entrenched at Marvel for a while, and to have attended many of the Marvel retreats. I remember the moment when Ed Brubaker [former long-time *Captain America* writer] said, ‘Here’s where Captain America dies, and here’s where Bucky takes over and tries to be Cap.’

Initially the run of Bucky as Cap was going to be a lot shorter; it was almost like one or two arcs, and then Cap was back. But Joe Quesada, who was editor-in-chief at the time, was, like, ‘No, there’s really something here – so let’s play with the idea of Bucky as Cap, and take Steve Rogers completely off the table for a while.’ Ed was, like, ‘Really?’ You get that kind of vibe sometimes, where it’s, like, ‘Okay, where can we go with this? What’s next?’

CH: So was it a similar situation when you killed poor Peter off?

DS: We knew from the moment that it happened, back in #700, that everybody was going to be saying, ‘Oh, he’s going to be back.’

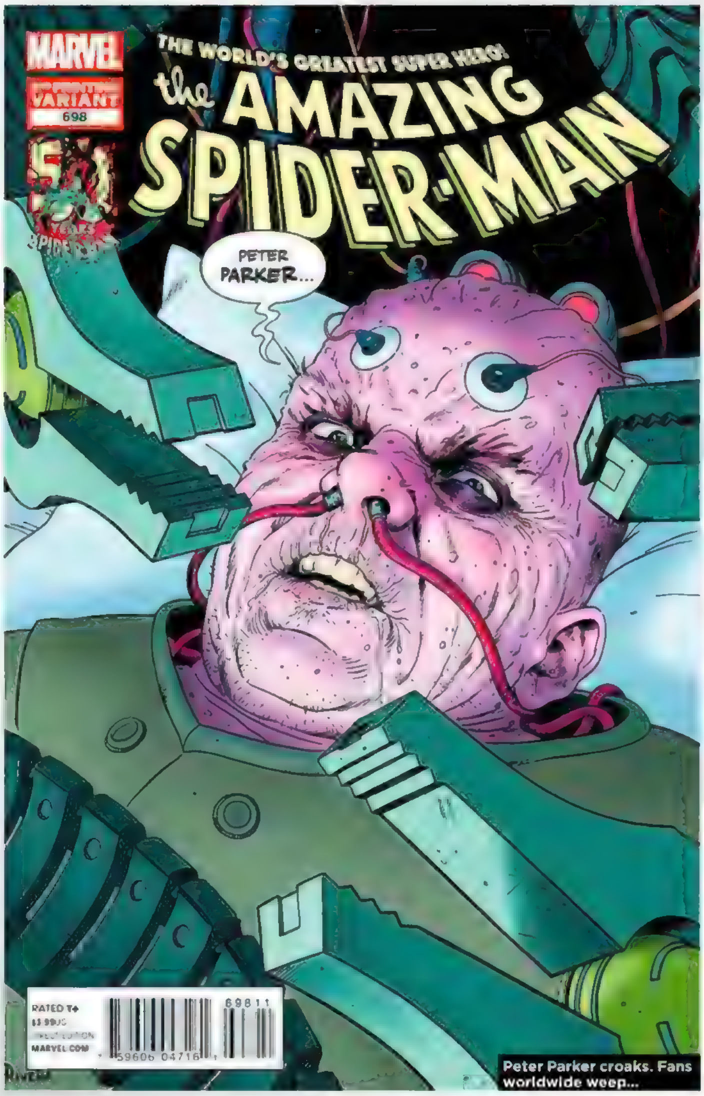
Fans are pretty jaded. They’ve been reading these things for 50 or 75 years, and they know how most of these tropes work. But, to us, a lot of that is like, ‘Okay, granted – that’s what you think we’re going to do, but what can we do to surprise you?’

A case in point: we turn over that card at the end of *Superior Spider-Man* #1, and no one saw it coming. Straight away, we started getting responses online like, ‘Oh, they should have only hinted at it – or they should have kept it going for 12 months.’ But, for every one of those kinds of people, there were 10 times more of them going, ‘Thank God he’s still there!’

I’m very happy that we made that move, as it takes everyone’s jaded expectations and flips them.

CH: So how does it work? Is Peter like a voice of reason in the back of Otto’s head?

DS: He has to serve a lot of purposes as that ghost. He’s got to be like his conscience, whispering at the edge of Doc’s perception. Like when Mary Jane was falling and Doc was going to shoot a web-line to catch her, and Peter’s like, ‘No! Use a web-net, or you’ll snap her neck and Gwen Stacy her!’ »



Peter Parker croaks. Fans worldwide weep...

DEEEEEEEEEE--

CH: Doc Ock really is a 'superior' Spider-Man to Peter – or, at least, he thinks he is – as he's busy using his vast intellect to enhance Spidey's performance. We often see him throwing extra technology at a problem, so, for instance, he reconfigures his old Octobots as web-bots so they can be his eyes and ears around the city.

DS: Oh, he *completely* thinks he's a 'superior Spider-Man'. But Peter is also a clever guy, so why didn't *he* do any of that? It's almost like the first time [the erstwhile Scarlet Spider] Ben Reilly shows up in the old '90s comics, and suddenly he's got impact webbing. Spider-Man is, like, 'Why didn't I come up with that?' But we all know how it is; we've all got the daily grind, and we all get into routines. Come New Year's Eve, we might make some resolutions – but we always break them!

CH: Like Peter, Otto gets plenty of laughs as Spidey – but he has a very different sense of humour going on there...

DS: It's the same way with a character like Frasier Crane [on *Cheers*, and later in *Fraser*], who can be really stuffy and full of himself – but is still very funny in his own way. And you've still got your wisecracking Peter Parker in the book too, because he's there as a kind of Greek chorus.

CH: We've seen Otto begin to mend his ways since he's become Spider-Man. Should we trust this? Is it believable?

DS: I don't think I'd want to write about a Spider-Man who – at least in his own mind – isn't starting to be heroic. You can debate whether this version of Spider-Man is a hero or not, but he thinks he's doing good – and on paper there are a lot of things he's doing right.

> **❝ Every time we try to write Mary Jane out, she finds a way to write herself back in ❞**

We've already seen that sequence in #4, where he's out patrolling all night in a far more effective and, yes, 'superior' way than Peter ever did. He's catching more crooks, he's webbing more guys up for the police and he's tying up more loose ends from the last adventure – which is something Peter was terrible at.

But then there's a fire raging, and he goes, 'You know what? I've done my duty tonight, so I'll re-route this to the fire department. So I'm going to swing right past it, because I promised Aunt May I'd be there for her morning therapy.'

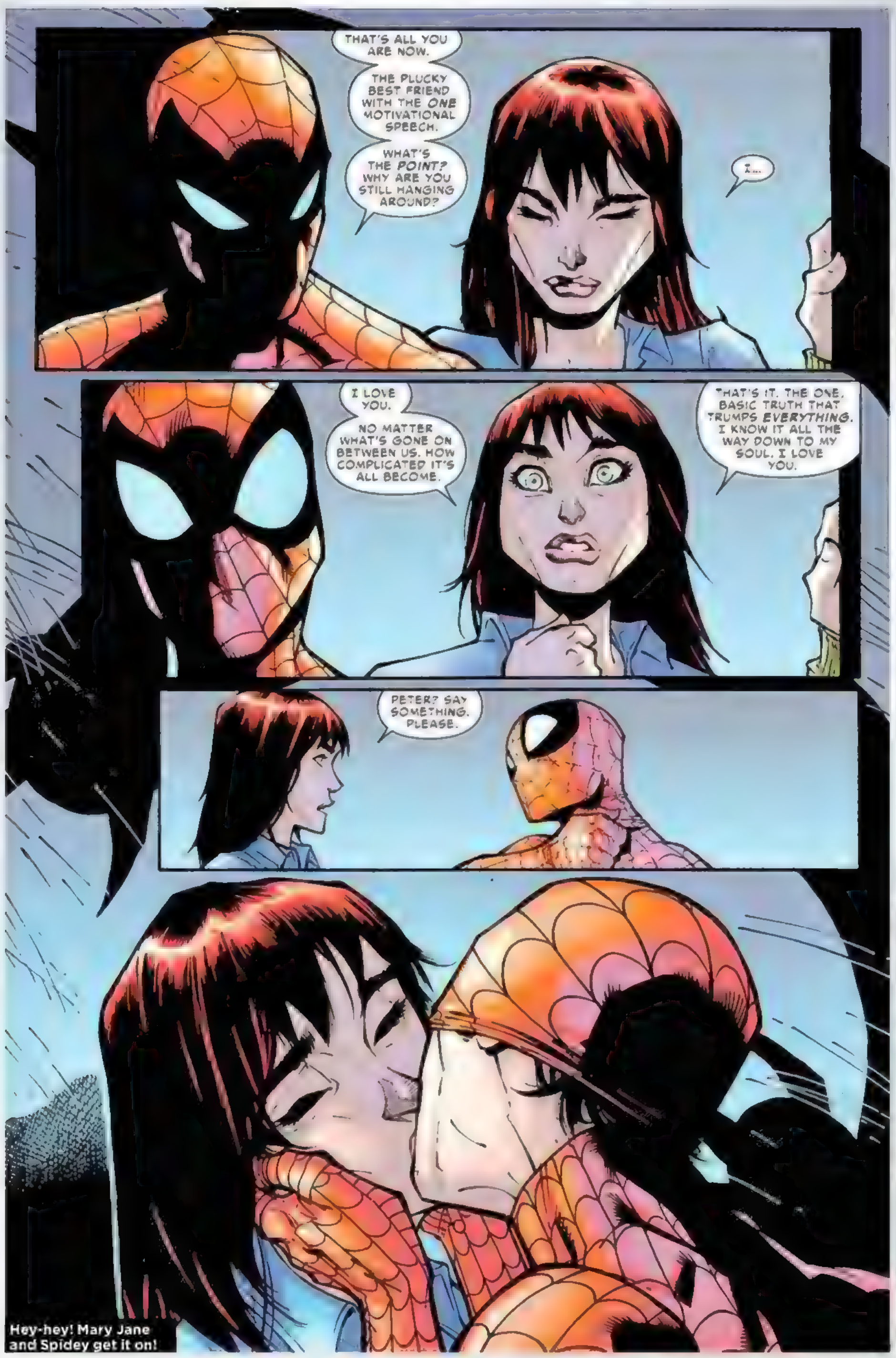
CH: Since Otto and Peter swapped bodies, people must have started noticing that Spidey has been acting *very* strangely lately. Isn't it only a matter of time before his nearest and dearest conclude that he's 'become a completely different person'?

DS: To be fair, Carlie Cooper [*Spider-Man* supporting character since 2007, a hot NYPD type who once dated Peter] got a really big clue in *Amazing* #700 when Peter, who was in Doc Ock's body, tells her, 'I can explain: Doc Ock switched our brains!'

She didn't believe it back then, but is now starting to get suspicious. In the past, we've seen Carlie take down her own father – who had secrets, as he was working with Mysterio – and her best friend Lily, who was actually Menace. We've also seen Captain Watanabe pretending to be the Wraith and taking down villains; that was before Carlie was able to do some detective work and figure out who the Wraith was. Right now, she has a theory, but it's a crazy one so she's got to put a case together before she can do anything about it, and pull the trigger.

CH: Carlie was created by your good self and Joe Quesada, and named after his daughter. As a Crime Scene Unit cop, does she make for a different kind of foil for Peter?

DS: Back when she was first introduced, I was working with a team of writers [the so-called 'Brain Trust' of Slott, Bob Gale, Marc Guggenheim and Zeb Wells, who took over the weekly *Amazing Spider-Man* in 2008 after the radical rewriting of Spidey's history in the divisive 'One More Day' storyline], so she's had a lot of fathers, as it were.


THAT'S ALL YOU ARE NOW.
THE PLUCKY BEST FRIEND WITH THE *ONE* MOTIVATIONAL SPEECH.
WHAT'S THE *POINT?* WHY ARE YOU STILL HANGING AROUND?
I...
I LOVE YOU.
NO MATTER WHAT'S GONE ON BETWEEN US. HOW COMPLICATED IT'S ALL BECOME.
THAT'S IT. THE ONE. BASIC TRUTH THAT TRUMPS *EVERYTHING*. I KNOW IT ALL THE WAY DOWN TO MY SOUL. I LOVE YOU.
PETER? SAY SOMETHING. PLEASE.

Hey-hey! Mary Jane and Spidey get it on!

Because there were a lot of people writing her at the beginning, she seemed to go in several different directions at once. This being the case, part of the fun of writing her as the sole *Spider-Man* writer – which I've been doing since 2010 – is that I could find a role for her and take her somewhere. The place she's ended up in is 'the ex-girlfriend, who happens to be on the force'. We've seen Peter have working relationships with police characters before – Captain Stacy, Jean DeWolff, or any number of other detectives and characters over the years – but with Carlie he was suddenly given this really neat dynamic. It's kind of like having Jean DeWolff around, but she's your ex-girlfriend so she knows all your secrets.

CH: And Mary Jane Watson is once again a major presence in Peter's life too...
DS: With 'One More Day', J Michael Straczynski and Joe Quesada undid MJ's marriage to Peter, and then wrote her out of the book. But, if you look at Mary Jane, she's been around since the '60s – and she'd been playing that role of the wife for a good 20 years. It was nice, then, to have her going away for a while – though, having said that, she seemed to be back in almost every story I wrote in the 'Brand New Day' era.

We all did one arc to start with, and then, in my second arc, I teased her and then brought her on camera in the 'Paper Dolls' story. I then did only one or two other arcs until *Amazing Spider-Man* #600, where the final reveal was that she was back in the cast. To me, it really doesn't feel like she's been gone all that long – though others may feel differently.

The thing is, MJ's such an iconic character. Along with J Jonah Jameson and Aunt May, she's just an incontestable part of the Spider-Man legacy. Every time we try to write her out, the character finds a way to write herself back in. There's no getting rid of her!

CH: So, apart from Carlie, will other people start realising Pete's no longer himself?
DS: That happens in #7 and #8, which we've already teased with Spider-Man being fired from the Avengers on the cover. People are noticing that Spidey is simply not acting right, and there will be repercussions. Also in #7 and #8 we see the return of Cardiac, who is a fan-favourite character from the '90s that we constantly get requests to bring back.

That said, it's going to be one of those times where it's a case of 'Be careful what you wish for' – because Superior Spider-Man is *not* nice to his villains!

CH: And what's coming up after that?
DS: We have a big game-changing issue in May with #9, which is one of the tent-pole issues of the run so far. Then #10 is going to deal with the fall-out from #9, while #11, #12 and #13 are a big arc where a lot of the things that we've been seeding since #700 – and some things that we seeded early on in 'Big Time' – come to a head in an adventure that I'll be co-writing with Christos Gage.

Then there's #14, which contains probably the biggest guilty pleasure of the run so far for me – and there aren't enough sound effects in the world for the stuff that happens in that issue, because so many things blow up!

CH: Any plans to leave the book soon, or are you on Spider-Man for the duration?
DS: Oh, I'm going *nowhere*. I worked on 'Brand New Day' with two different teams of writers from 2008 and 2010, so for me it really only feels like I've been properly doing Spidey for two to three years, when I really got to call the shots, and be the one guy sitting in the chair going, 'Okay, so now he joins this new place, and we'll call it… Horizon Labs!'

I know I worked on *Spider-Man* for three years before then, but that was like three years in a scrum!

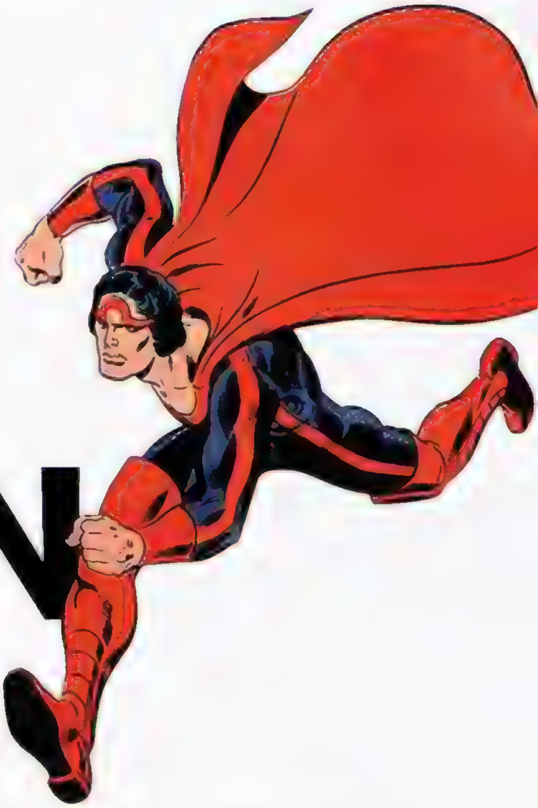
CH: So do you have the time to take on any extra assignments this year?
DS: We shall see! The weird thing about Spidey is that, even though it comes out twice a month, most times it really feels like it's three times a month for me – because I have to make sure that all three art teams (Ryan Stegman, Guiseppe Camuncoli and Humberto Ramos, who is one of my favourite Spidey guys of all time) are busy drawing, and that no one is sitting on their hands. There's a constant need to keep working, in other words.

CH: So do you ever get the chance to get on top of all of your deadlines and take a short breather?
DS: No, I don't! But that's just part of the adventure – and it gives the issues a kind of manic energy that comes with that. Fortunately, Steve Wacker is an amazing editor – and a master planner. We plot everything out meticulously, so we know where it's all going to go and we have all our stories lined up. There's always a plan. Steve's also able to see when I'm slowing down.

Every now and again, he'll go, 'We need to catch up – we'll bring in your buddy Chris Gage to co-write with you for a few issues.' It just has to get done, because we produce at least 24 issues of *Spider-Man* a year, and if they're not out on time, the fans get really upset. **CH**

***Superior Spider-Man** continues; it's proving to be one of the oddest, freshest takes on the character we've enjoyed in years.*

HIDDEN
GEMS



UNKNOWN SOLDIER

The experimental Marvel of the '70s produced many clunkers, yet some – like the bizarre, incomplete *Omega The Unknown* – have something about them that won't let go... **By James Lovegrove**

Arguably, Steve Gerber's oddest creation of all during his wacky mid-'70s Marvel pomp was *Omega The Unknown*. Here was a comic which attempted to do to the superhero genre what punk rock was doing to the music scene: turn it on its head, ground it in the real, and give it a good old boot up the bum. *Omega The Unknown* was not as successful as punk in accomplishing its goals, but that's not for want of trying. Its trouble was that it was too oblique, too subtle, too rooted in the mundane. And that it had art by Jim Mooney.

Gerber co-wrote the title with Mary Skrenes, a screenwriter whose other genre credits include issues of *The Defenders* and episodes of animated TV shows like *GI Joe* and *Transformers*. She was Gerber's inspiration for the character of Beverly Switzler, Howard the Duck's free-spirited human girlfriend. What Skrenes brought to *Omega The Unknown* is unclear – it's been said she helped develop some of the well-rounded female supporting cast here too – but the comic has an insistently low-rent, blue-collar feel.

SILENT WITNESS

Nominally *Omega The Unknown* is about the title character, an alien superbeing with enhanced strength and the ability to shoot beams of power from his hands. His costume's headband is shaped like the Greek letter omega, as are the marks which appear on his palms, stigmata-like, whenever he lets loose with one of his fiery energy bolts. Hence, his name.

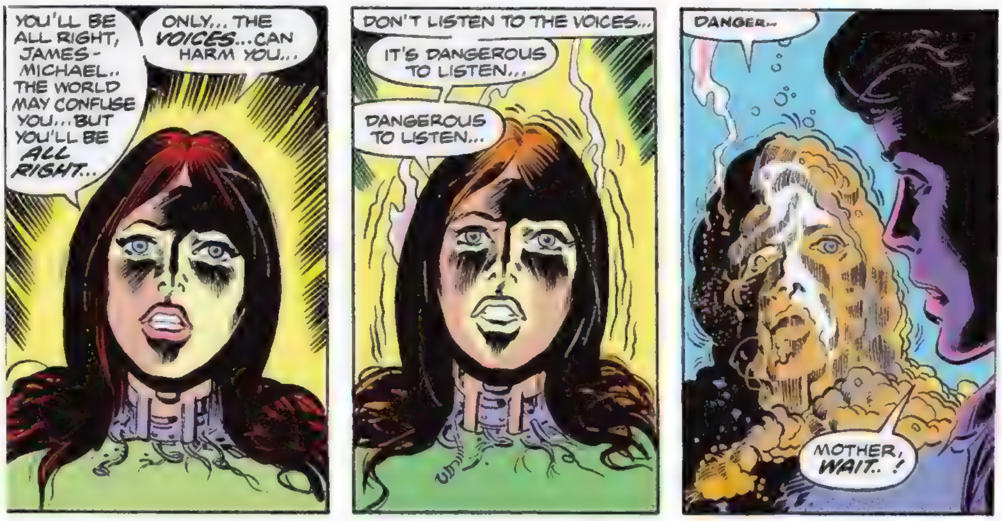
He is also, in the first few issues at least, mute. He doesn't utter a word until #4, and then it's an appropriately puzzled and anguished 'Why...?' He's not that talkative thereafter, either.

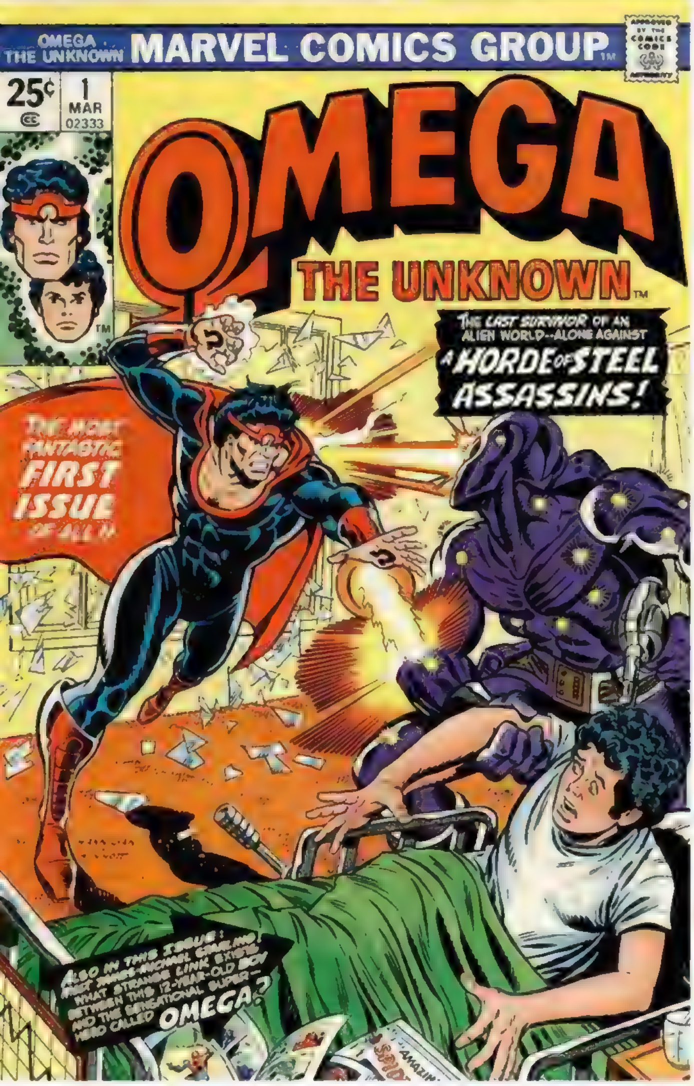
Omega looks like a superhero, dresses like one, battles supervillains (the likes of Electro, Nitro and, ahem, El Gato, a Latino sorcerer baddie who can control cats), and even has a run-in with the Hulk. It's almost impossible to think of him as anything *other* than a superhero – yet he consistently refuses to behave like one.

In #7, he actually lets an antagonist, Blockbuster, walk free at the end of their fight, swayed by the bad guy's argument that he stole in order to help his estranged son: "I – I gotta make sure he never hasta rob banks! I can't let him grow up like me!" Omega understands that people do what they have to do to survive. There's a higher court than the law. There's moral justice.

Omega isn't *really* the star of the book either. That would be James-Michael Starling, a precocious, articulate 12-year-old with whom Omega has some sort of psychic bond. When Omega is hurt or stunned, so is James-Michael. Omega appears to be the boy's protector – but as the tale unfurls, the connection between the two deepens and grows more

Below: James-Michael discovers that his mother isn't quite what she seemed...


YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT, JAMES-MICHAEL.. THE WORLD MAY CONFUSE YOU...BUT YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT...
ONLY... THE VOICES...CAN HARM YOU...
DON'T LISTEN TO THE VOICES...
IT'S DANGEROUS TO LISTEN...?
DANGEROUS TO LISTEN...
DANGER..
MOTHER, WAIT..!


OMEGA THE UNKNOWN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
25¢
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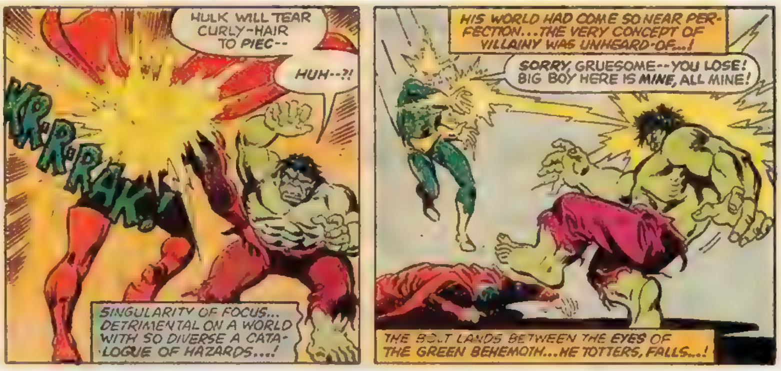
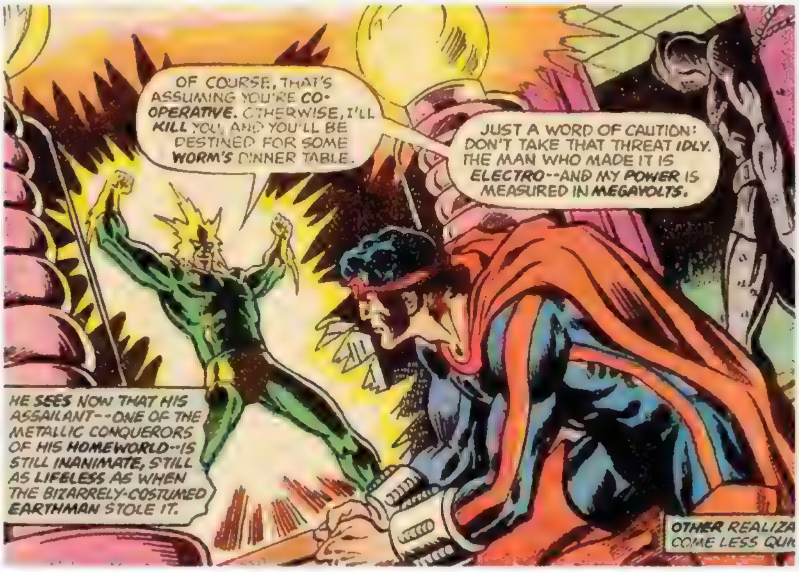
02333
OMEGA
THE UNKNOWN
THE LAST SURVIVOR OF AN ALIEN WORLD--ALONE AGAINST A HORDE OF STEEL ASSASSINS!
THE MOST FANTASTIC FIRST ISSUE OF ALL!
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: MEET JAMES-MICHAEL STARLING! WHAT STRANGE LINK EXISTS BETWEEN THIS 12-YEAR-OLD BOY AND THE SENSATIONAL SUPER-HERO CALLED OMEGA?

Above: It may appear that Omega's the star, but the real hero of *OTU* is 12-year-old James-Michael Starling.


HULK WILL TEAR CURLY-HAIR TO PIEC--
HUH--?!
KR-R-RAK!
SINGULARITY OF FOCUS... DETRIMENTAL ON A WORLD WITH SO DIVERSE A CATALOGUE OF HAZARDS...!
HIS WORLD HAD COME SO NEAR PERFECTION...THE VERY CONCEPT OF VILLAINY WAS UNHEARD-OF...!
SORRY, GRUESOME--YOU LOSE! BIG BOY HERE IS MINE, ALL MINE!
THE BOLT LANDS BETWEEN THE EYES OF THE GREEN BEHEMOTH...HE TOTTERS, FALLS...!


OF COURSE, THAT'S ASSUMING YOU'RE CO-OPERATIVE. OTHERWISE, I'LL KILL YOU, AND YOU'LL BE DESTINED FOR SOME WORM'S DINNER TABLE.
JUST A WORD OF CAUTION: DON'T TAKE THAT THREAT IDLY. THE MAN WHO MADE IT IS ELECTRO--AND MY POWER IS MEASURED IN MEGAVOLTS.
HE SEES NOW THAT HIS ASSAILANT--ONE OF THE METALLIC CONQUERORS OF HIS HOMEWORLD--IS STILL INANIMATE, STILL AS LIFELESS AS WHEN THE BIZARRELY-COSTUMED EARTHMAN STOLE IT.
OTHER REALIZA
COME LESS QUI

mysterious. Soon James-Michael is also firing bolts from his hands, albeit with less accuracy and restraint than his adult counterpart.

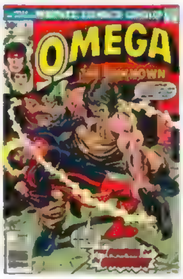
In #1 it is revealed that James-Michael's parents are robots who have been bringing him up in rural isolation and educating him themselves. When they are obliterated in a car crash, James-Michael winds up in New York, and is taken into the care of a nurse, Ruth Hart, and her flatmate Amber, an even more sexualised and easygoing version of Mary-Jane Watson.

Now James-Michael is thrown into the urban shark tank that is '70s Hell's Kitchen, and must endure the brutal, *Lord Of The Flies* regime that is junior high school. As sensitive and unworldly as he is hyper-intelligent, he's a far cry from the implausibly cutesy brats most comics of the time had to offer.

Likewise, the New York in *Omega The Unknown* – although identifiably a part of the Marvel universe – is all too grubbily true to life. For instance, as Ruth, Amber and James-Michael enter their apartment building, having just been verbally harassed by a couple of Hispanic men and hustled by a panhandler with the DTs, there's this priceless exchange of dialogue:

Ruth: *Eewgh*
The corridor's been violated again.
James-Michael: *Sniff*
Am I mistaken – or is that the odor of human excrement?
Amber: That's the most convenient part about living in a jungle, right, Ruth? You can go anywhere.

You wouldn't find captions like that in *Amazing Spider-Man*.


MARVEL COMICS GROUP
OMEGA
THE UNKNOWN

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
OMEGA
THE UNKNOWN
GAMBLE!

SPACE ODDITY

Omega The Unknown lasted just 10 issues, including a couple of creditable fill-ins written by Roger Stern and Scott Edelman. It's clear that Gerber and Skrenes had great plans for the comic. Tantalising little clues about Omega's true identity and his relationship to James-Michael are dropped along the way, like a trail of breadcrumbs, yet questions remain. Where is Omega from? Why is he on Earth? And who are these faceless robots who keep trying to kill him and James-Michael?

Perhaps, had someone less journeyman than Mooney been pencilling the strip, the artwork would have sustained readers' interest through the narrative smoulder, and sales would have been healthy. But they weren't, and cancellation inevitably struck. The closing panel of the final issue sees Omega being shot and killed by cops, who mistake his menacing of the villainous Ruby Thursday as an assault on a defenceless civilian.

A resolution to this cliffhanger ending came two years later in *Defenders* #76-77, written by Steven Grant, in which it is revealed that Omega and James-Michael are artificial humanoids who were created by a robotic race, the Protar, as organic prototypes for a next stage of evolution. Both were bestowed with the power to tap into 'biospheric energy' by yet another alien race, the inhabitants of the planet Srenesk (spot the anagram). Omega, in the mistaken belief that the Protar were an attacking enemy, unleashed his full power and inadvertently destroyed Srenesk – and, since then, the Protar have been bent on eradicating him and James-Michael before either of them can cause any further apocalyptic harm.

It was a trite conclusion to a series that had the potential to be so much more than a run-of-the-mill superhero bash-'em-up, although there was always enough action in *Omega The Unknown* to satisfy those jonesing for costume-on-costume slugfests. This was a comic about everyday characters, about the development and social education of a bright but maladjusted young person, and about the casual cruelties people inflict on one another in all walks of life. It deserved a longer run.

Author Jonathan Lethem, who as a boy was fascinated by Omega and name-checks the character in his novel *The Fortress Of Solitude*, scripted an intriguing 10-issue-miniseries reboot in 2006, but the oddball original remains distinctive and – bland art and unsatisfactory ending notwithstanding – unimprovable. CH

Omega The Unknown *ran from 1976-77; the original run, plus the follow-up* ***Defenders*** *issues, were collected as a graphic novel in 2008.*

IT'S MILLAR'S TIME

From *Kick-Ass* to *American Jesus*, *War Heroes* to *Nemesis*, few comic creators are quite so keen to shock and entertain as Mark Millar. **Matt Bielby** catches up with this Glaswegian force of nature, and finds out why *Jupiter's Legacy* may just be his most ambitious project yet...

There's never been a comic book creator quite like Mark Millar: the constant churn of high-concept, movie-friendly ideas; the gleeful willingness to revolt; the bouncy happiness to self-promote; the high-energy bobbing from one project to the next. In all this – the shock tactics aside – he's the nearest thing we've got to the new Stan Lee.

"My approach has basically been, 'What if Quentin Tarantino made a superhero movie?'" he says. "Often what I want is to get you laughing, then immediately have something awful happen – so the audience never gets too comfortable. That's the approach, and it's very much taken from early Tarantino."

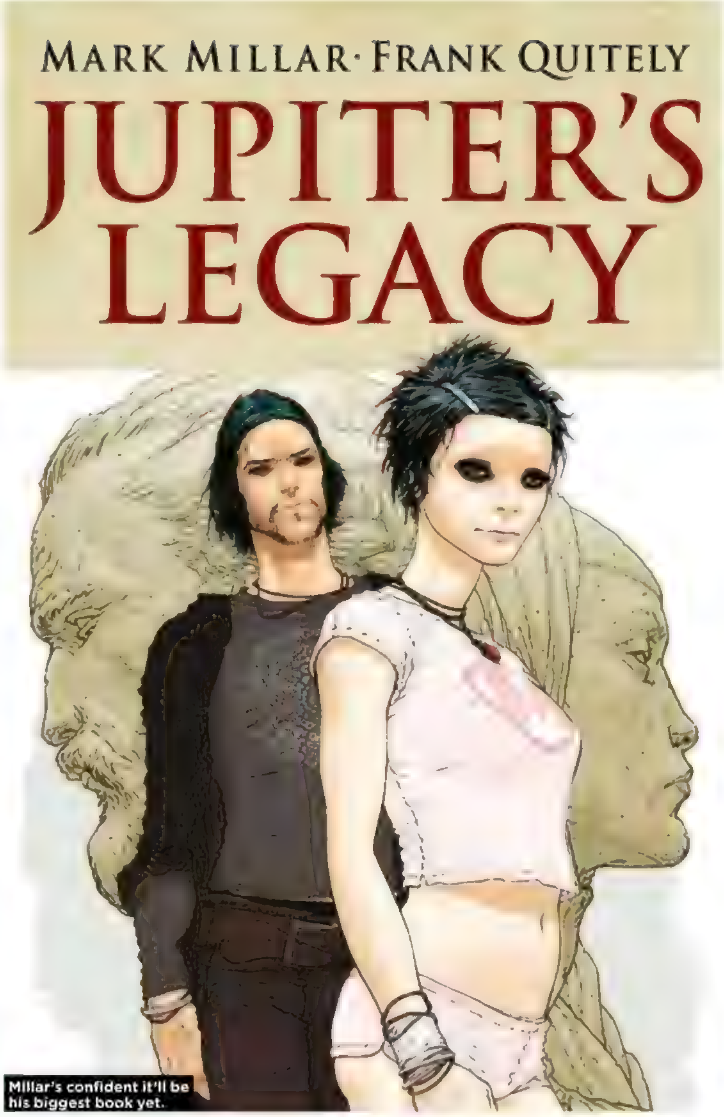
Millar's written every major comic book character at one point or another – Judge Dredd and Robo-Hunter at *2000 AD*; Superman, Swamp Thing and the Flash at DC; Wolverine, Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four at Marvel – but it's with more personal projects that he's really made his mark. More personal – and more violent, for Millar has been a relentless advocate of pushing the edge of acceptability in the vast bulk of his work.

At *2000 AD*, the 'Summer Offensive' of 1993 he masterminded with Grant Morrison – much of Millar's early work was with the then-more-established fellow Scot – turned off as many as it attracted, with new characters like the superpowered 'white van man' Big Dave proving particularly divisive, while his take on the highly influential *The Authority* with Frank Quitely, replacing creators Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch, seemed desperate to amp up the over-the-top 'widescreen' action and ultra-violence yet further.

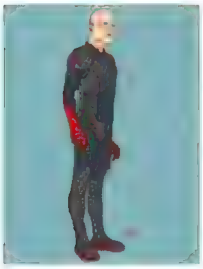
Not all his shocks, however, are of the schoolboy-giggling let's-see-how-far-we-can-take-this variety that we see in recent big hits like *Kick-Ass*, however; there are sweeter works in his oeuvre too, not least highly inventive and respectful takes on such icons as Superman. But it was at Marvel that it all really came together, when he teamed up with Bryan Hitch for *The Ultimates* – basically: *The Authority* Part 2, but using alt universe versions of the famous Marvel characters, pushing the horror-style shocks lower in the mix but hardly skimping on the surprises and cliffhangers. It was a triumph, and one of the most influential books of recent decades. All the vast-scale Marvel crossovers of late – the current *Age Of Ultron* is a good example – and the entire look and feel of the *Avengers* movie owe *The Ultimates* a great debt.

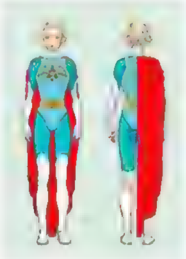
SCREEN QUEST

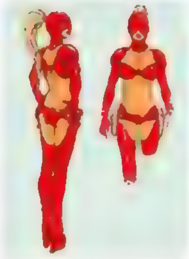
For most of the last decade, however, Millar's focus has shifted again: now he mainly concentrates on creator-owned books, via a number of publishers but under a broad 'Millarworld' banner, using only the very biggest name artistic collaborators and with movie potential firmly in mind. Yes, there's



Millar's confident it'll be his biggest book yet.







been the odd misfire – few have much love for *The Unfunnies*, which mixed a Roger Rabbit cartoon world with such grim real-world concerns as child pornography to audience-losing effect – but, by-and-large, these titles have been huge hits.

“ My approach has basically been, ‘What if Quentin Tarantino made a superhero movie?’ ”

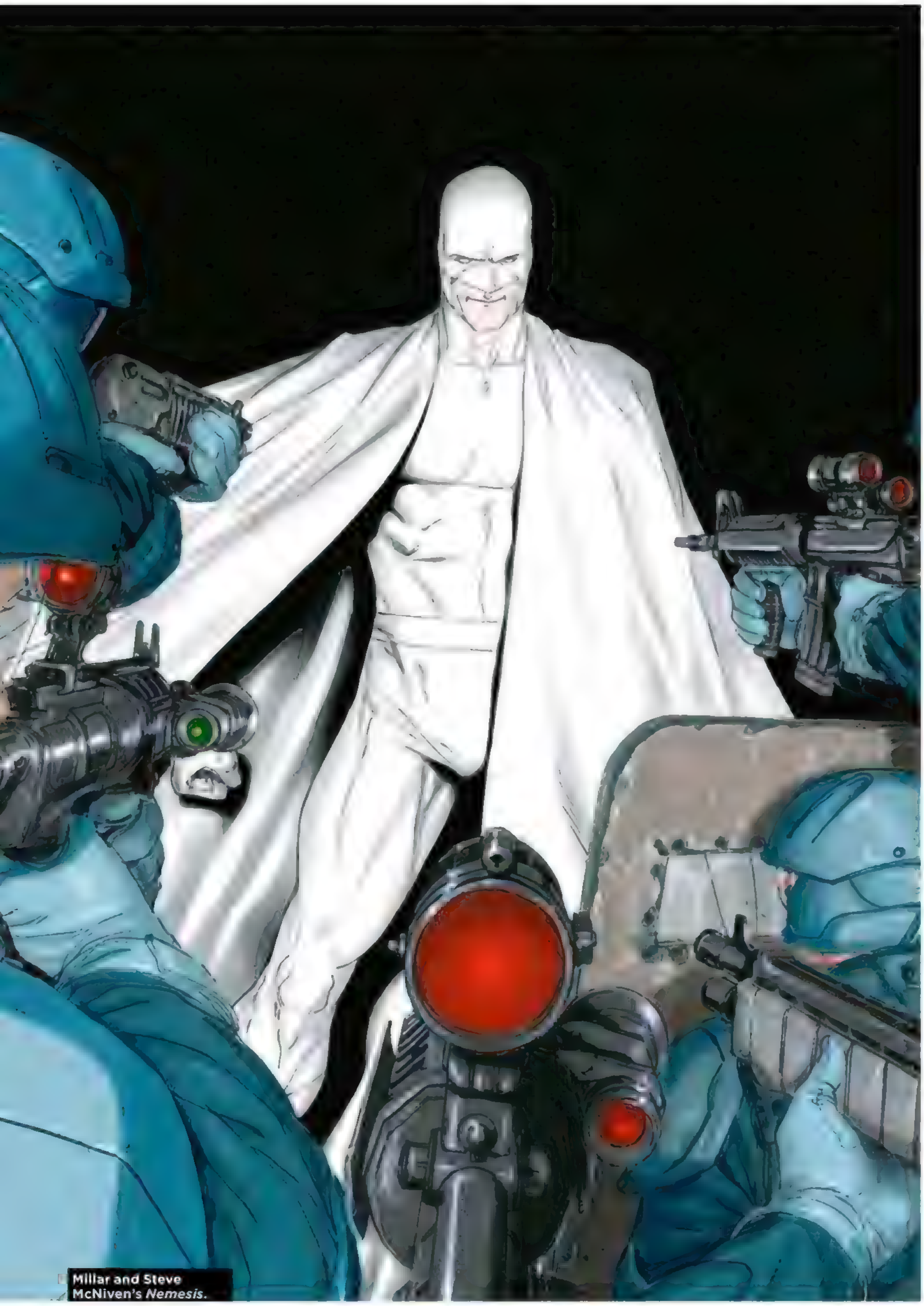
Part of Millar's secret – beyond craft, showmanship and endless invention – is his genuine love for mainstream comic books, and most of Millarworld is based on sharp reversals of superhero story expectation. What if a regular teenager in the real world, with no powers, attempted to be a masked vigilante? What if the supervillains won and covertly took over the world? What if Batman was a murderous villain? What if Iraq was fought using superpowered soldiers, not foot patrols and drones?

“The way I'm currently working,” Millar tells me, as excited with events as ever and eager to share, “is that I do the comic book version of a new project one year, and then the movies get done the year after. 2013 is largely a movie year, so *Kick-Ass 2* is now finished, *The Secret Service* is shooting soon – Matthew Vaughn is directing that one – then it's *Superior*, and *Nemesis* at 20th Century Fox too. *Supercrooks* is ongoing also, and there are maybe a couple of others I can't talk about too.”

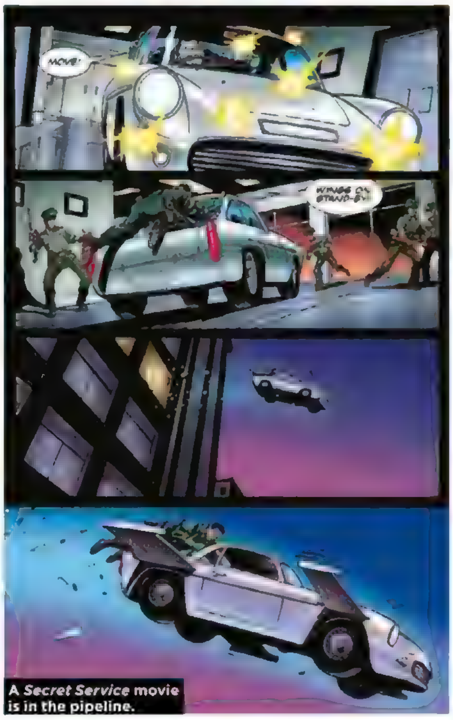
FOX CLEVER

And it's not just films based on his own properties either.

“Well, that's true. I've actually got a job, of sorts, at Fox – it's as close to a regular job as I think I'll ever have – overseeing the *X-Men* films and their other superhero movies, like *Fantastic Four*. It's a job that didn't exist before, and part of my role is to make sure that Fox becomes the perfect home for Marvel properties. So far, the *Fantastic Four* films haven't been very good, the third *X-Men* film wasn't very good, and I didn't like many things about the first *Wolverine* – but stuff simply had to get better, and I think they now are doing. Certainly, the way James Mangold is shooting *The Wolverine*, for instance, is incredible; it almost looks like a David Lean film.” »



Millar and Steve McNiven's *Nemesis.*



A *Secret Service* movie is in the pipeline.

So, what is it you actually *do* for them?

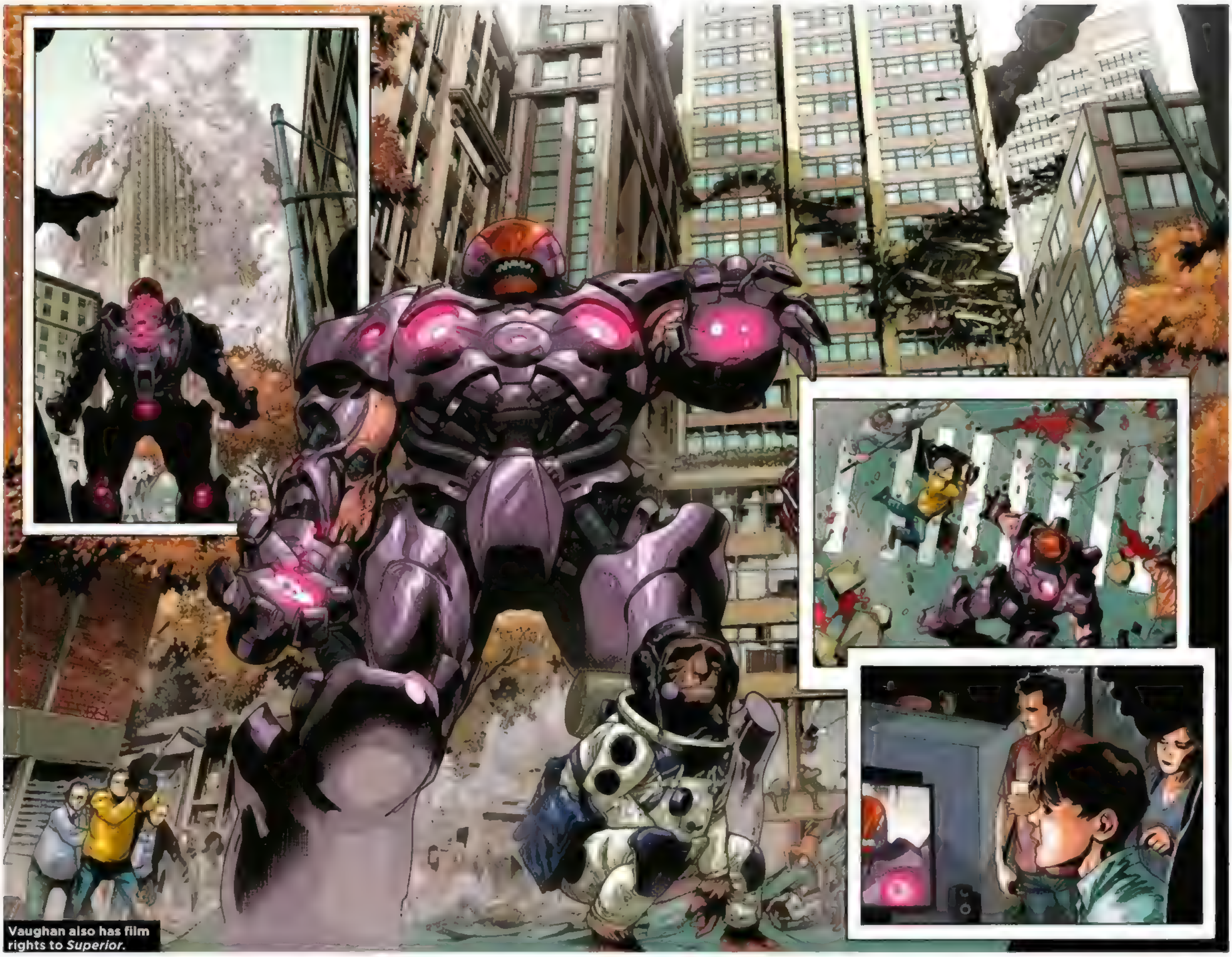
"Well, part of my job is to write an over-arching plot that runs through all their films – it's like Joss Whedon's role at Marvel Studios – and links them together as a universe. The strange thing is that Marvel sold off the rights to all its most valuable characters in the '90s – Spider-Man, X-Men, the FF – and that basically left them with the things nobody wanted, like Iron Man, Thor, Cap – basically, all the Avengers characters. It's an incredible thing how they've since turned everything around, so all those characters are now the gold standard, the important ones. The challenge at Fox is to emulate what they did with those so-called 'lesser' characters – and we've certainly got the tools to do it. After all, the X-Men alone gives you hundreds of cool characters to play with – and then, when you add the likes of Doctor Doom and Magneto, you really start to see the potential."

It's an incredible workload, I venture; most people would buckle under the weight.

"The thing is, I'm *not* that fast," Millar offers. "People think I am, and it can look that way because of how high profile so many of the projects are, but I'm really not. Lots of writers do three or four comic books in a month, but I've never done more than two – in fact, 13 or 14 issues a year is about comfortable for me."

Yet Millar somehow always seems to have a ton of new projects on the go – lately there's been a children's novel written, with the movie rights already sold ("it exercised totally different writing muscles doing that," he says) and a move into television, starting with a feel-good documentary about a Glasgow theatre – called *Pavilion Of Dreams*, it went out on BBC Scotland in January.

Towering above all these, however, is what might just be his most ambitious superhero



Vaughan also has film rights to *Superior.*

“ I want to do what Marvel once did… I don’t miss Marvel. I want to *be* Marvel ”

project yet. *Jupiter’s Legacy* – it was originally going to be called ‘Jupiter’s Children’, but “it turns out this really obscure band in LA has the same name and wanted millions of dollars if we were to use it, and I’m so tight I won’t pay a *dollar*, so we had to change things” – comes out in April from Image, and is a 10-part, multi-character, quite serious take on superheroes, and how they connect to the American psyche, with artist Frank Quitely.

“It’s one of the most exciting things I’ve ever worked on,” Millar says. “Frank is everyone’s favourite artist, and we’ve been friends for a long time; we went on holiday to France with our families not that long ago, for instance. This is our answer to one of those big Marvel or DC summer event books, but creator owned – and it’s the biggest Millarworld project to date. It’s heaving with Frank’s great character designs, and though the main story is a contemporary one, we have all these flashbacks to an earlier generation, more innocent times, and we see what superheroes were doing then – in a way, it’s my tribute to the Golden Age of superheroes, when all this stuff felt new, but, at the same time, it’s really more to do with the universal difference between the generations than any great commentary on the genre.”

GENERATION GAMES

Huge in ambition and heaving with mythological references, *Jupiter’s Legacy* drags in much of the human experience – from huge issues like contemporary worries about the sustainability of our economic model to the age-old rivalries between fathers and sons. It appears to have a great deal to do with the kids of the famous too – that second generation of rock star or movie actor, where some do well (a Michael Douglas or Stella McCartney, say), but others flounder. Despite being given every opportunity, they simply seem to lack the magic and drive their parents had…

“We watch the first generation of superheroes,” Millar says, “gaining their powers in seemingly magical fashion on a mysterious island, and then we switch to the present day – these original guys are all dead or retired, and the current generation are wondering what their purpose is, convinced they can’t live up to the legacy of the people that went before them. The question, of course, is are they right?”

Some fear for the book – can Quitely keep up the pace? – but Millar insists he’s working faster and better than he ever has, and that the book is on course for its current schedule: five issues at a fortnightly frequency, then a gap, then the concluding half later in the summer.

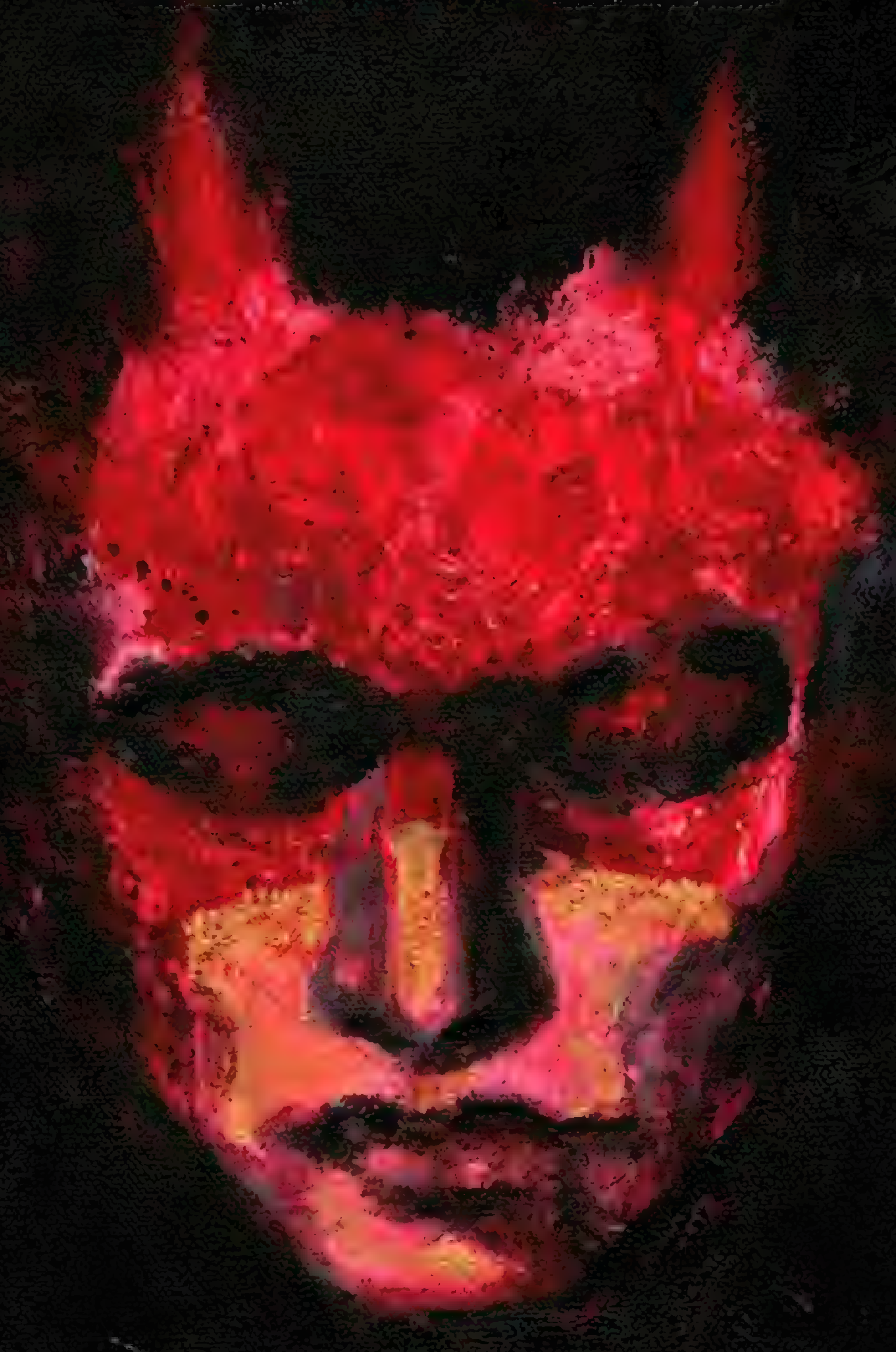
“The important thing for me,” Millar says, “is that we make all this old stuff feel fresh and special: *The Authority* certainly did that, as did *Watchmen*, *The Ultimates* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. That’s what we’re aiming for here.”

Millar, once again, is building his own playground, then. For a while there, perhaps seven or eight years ago, he was one of the main guys at Marvel, and much of the important stuff it did came from him. So I ask him, do you miss those days at all?

“I want to do what Marvel once did,” Millar says. “I want to create characters and franchises that will make waves and that will last, but ones that are owned by individuals, not by a company. I don’t miss Marvel. I want to *be* Marvel.”

Jupiter’s Legacy *begins in April from Image;* ***Kick-Ass 2*****,** ***Hit-Girl*****,** ***The Secret Service*** *and many other Millarworld collections are available from Titan Books; the film* ***Kick-Ass 2*** *is due in July.*

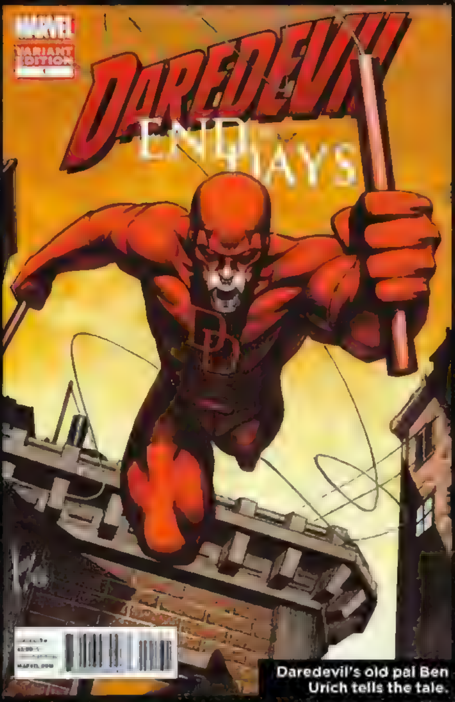
THE DEVIL IN ME



Most of Marvel's 'The End' projects – set in the future, and detailing the death or last adventure of prominent characters – have been one-shot gigs, but not for *Daredevil: End Of Days*, an eight-issue miniseries by some of the biggest names in the business. A warning: it may get grim...

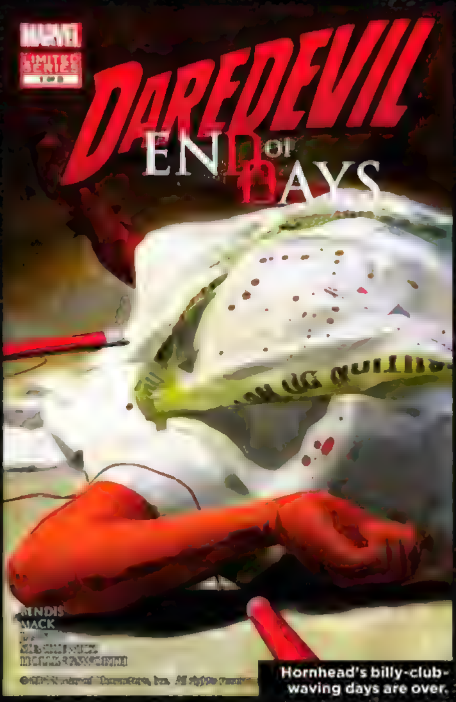
By Stephen Jewell

All images © Marvel Comics



Daredevil's old pal Ben Urich tells the tale.

A losing hand, in more ways than one.



Hornhead's billy-club-waving days are over.

While Mark Waid's current Eisner Award-winning ongoing stint on Daredevil's monthly book harks wistfully back to the more innocent era of Matt Murdock's early '70s stories, Brian Michael Bendis and David Mack's long-awaited, currently ongoing *End Of Days* miniseries is taking old Hornhead down a distinctly bleaker path. Springing out of Bendis' four-year tenure on Matt Murdock's flagship monthly of a fair few years back – it ended in 2006 – veteran *Daredevil* artists Klaus Janson and Bill Sienkiewicz were recruited to pencil and ink the majority of the eight-parter, which – after a protracted gestation period – finally debuted in October 2012, with #8 due out next month.

Setting out to chronicle The Man Without Fear's final case, it is told from the perspective of his long-time ally, investigative reporter Ben Urich – himself on his last assignment, with the impending closure of the *Daily Bugle* – as he attempts to solve the mystery of the billy-club-wielding superhero's brutal murder.

"For those who are fans of Mark's *Daredevil*, I apologise profusely for what has happened," laughs Bendis. "It is completely the opposite tonally to what is going on in that book. People are going to be jarred – but at the time we started working on it, we thought, 'Let's do a much darker vision of what we were already doing on *Daredevil*, which was very dark to start with.' Now, however, Mark's *Daredevil* is well under way and is much lighter in comparison – which makes what we're doing look almost hilariously grotesque!"

Compared to the radical dystopian scenarios of something like Frank Miller's iconic *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, say, *End Of Days* is actually closer in style to Martin Scorsese's classic '70s New York-based oeuvre.

"I was talking recently to the director Joe (*The A-Team, The Grey*) Carnahan about how disappointed he was that 20th Century Fox didn't pick up his proposed take for a new Daredevil film, which he said was going to be like a superhero version of *Serpico*," recalls Bendis. "Well, that's exactly what this is! We've been working on it for a few years, and it feels like a Daredevil story that's happening in the world of *Taxi Driver* – even though it's set in the future."

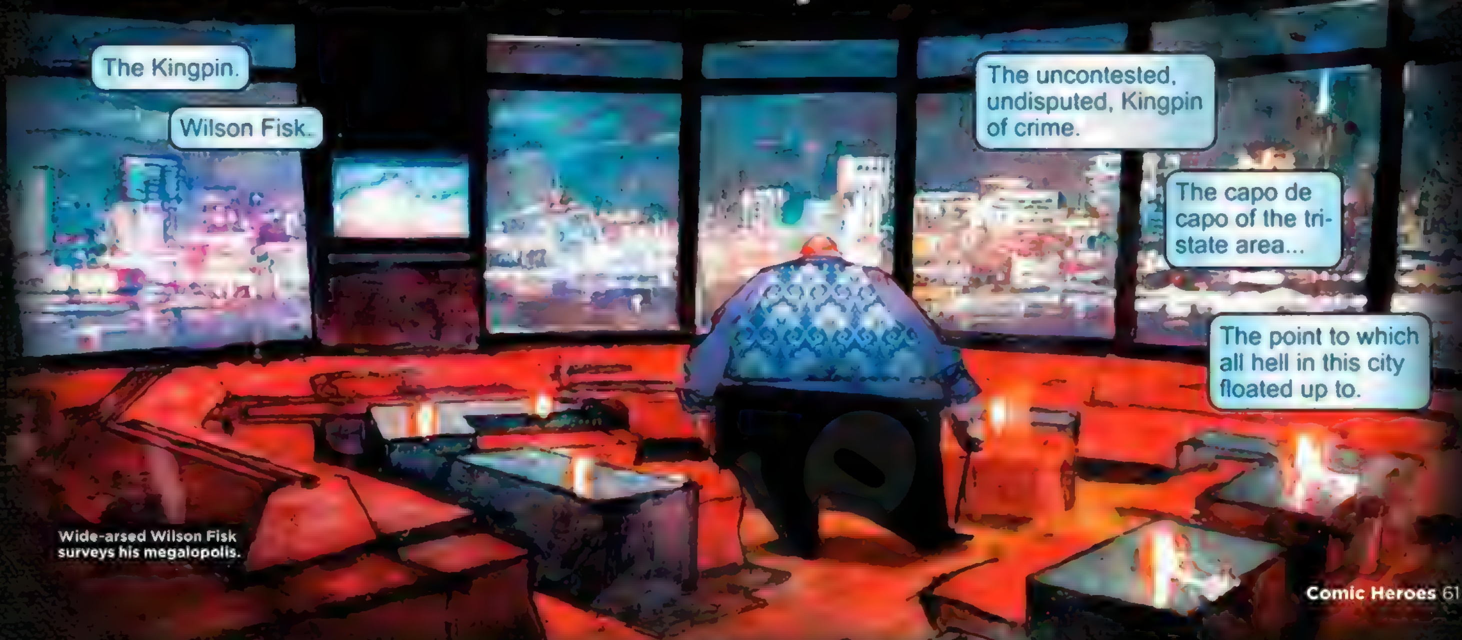
> **"It's like a love letter to the entire Daredevil mythos"**

WILDERNESS OF PAIN

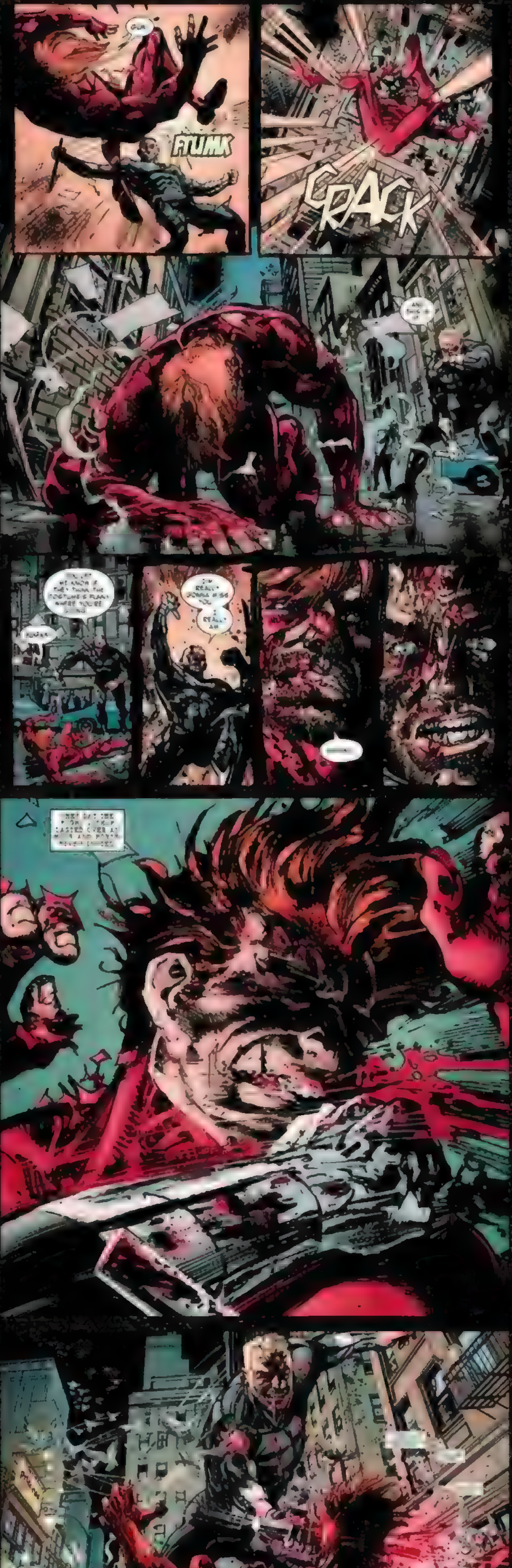
Having not only inked *The Dark Knight Returns* but also worked with Miller on his seminal four-year early '80s *Daredevil* run, Janson knows the Sightless Swashbuckler and his tormented alter-ego better than most.

"There's a reason why I haven't done any more *Daredevil* from then until now, and that's because I was waiting for the right project to come along," he explains when *Comic Heroes* sat down with him, Sienkiewicz and Mack after their recent appearance at the London Super Comic Con. "It's been over 30 years since Frank and I did *Daredevil* together, and since then I've only done one panel of a jam issue as a favour."

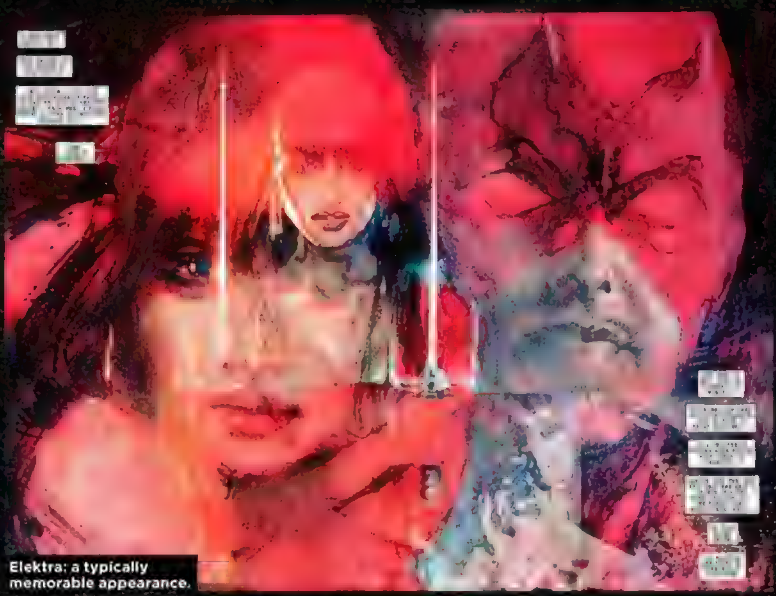
Having collaborated with Miller on the surreally freewheeling *Electra: Assassin* Epic series and the *Daredevil: Love And War* graphic novel, also in the '80s, Sienkiewicz, too, is very familiar with Matt Murdock's perpetually tragic world. Meanwhile, Mack contributed to Joe Quesada's trailblazing


The Kingpin.
Wilson Fisk.
The uncontested, undisputed, Kingpin of crime.
The capo de capo of the tri-state area...
The point to which all hell in this city floated up to.

Wide-arsed Wilson Fisk surveys his megalopolis.



It's the mother of all bloody street brawls.



Elektra: a typically memorable appearance.

Marvel Knights imprint when he first teamed up with the future Marvel chief creative officer on the pivotal *Daredevil* storyline 'Parts Of The Whole' in 1999, before flying solo in 2003 on the lavishly painted 'Vision Quest', which introduced deaf superheroine Echo as a natural foil for our hero.

"All of us have done a certain amount of work on *Daredevil* over the years, and Klaus and Bill in particular have done some especially legendary stories," says Mack. "I feel like this series has a place in the bibliography of their work, as it has elements of things that all of us have done in our own *Daredevil* runs. In a way it's like a love letter to the entire Daredevil mythos"

Having first inked the late great Gene Colan on 1975's *Daredevil* #124, four years before Frank Miller's arrival on the then ailing bi-monthly in 1979 – Miller was initially pencilling Roger McKenzie's scripts, before also assuming writing reins in 1981 – Janson feels almost like the character's custodian.

"I was kind of like the main guy on the book back then," he says, "and in a lot of ways it was more like my book than the penciller's, because we had such a rotating array of them. My job was simply to keep the characters looking consistent – as it was back in the day, when people were actually concerned about such things!"

According to the 61-year-old, *End Of Days* could turn out to be his Daredevil swansong.

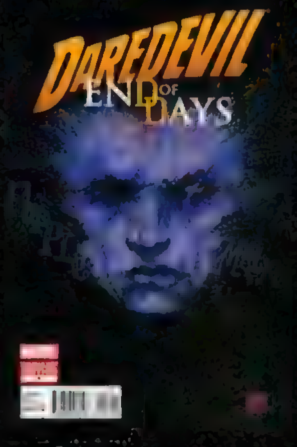
"In my house, we've nicknamed it 'The End of Klaus'," laughs Janson. "It might be another 25 years before I go back to Daredevil again, but this was a worthy project to return to him for. Not to sound too pretentious, but if what Frank and I did has since taken on some kind of iconic standing in the Daredevil canon, there was no point going back for something that was just going to be a bit ordinary. We're all very happy with the way that this series has turned out. We're so close to finishing it, and being able to pull this off, that there's a certain energy about the last few issues."

DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND

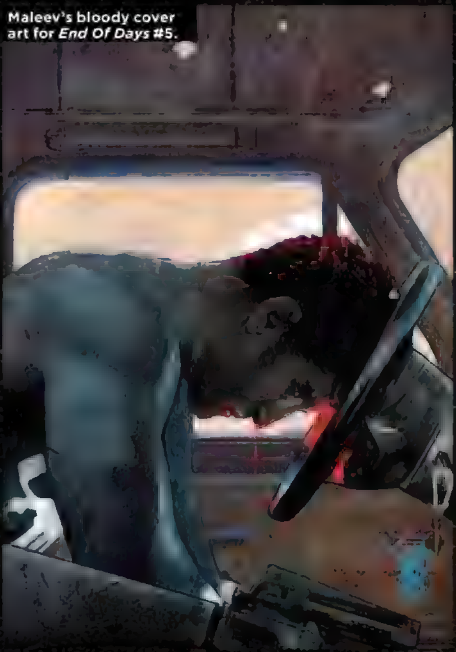
According to Bendis, *End Of Days* was conceived in a fashion that would get the best out of each of his collaborator's abilities.

"What we've done is construct a narrative that allows all of the artists to really stretch themselves," he says. "They're not just great

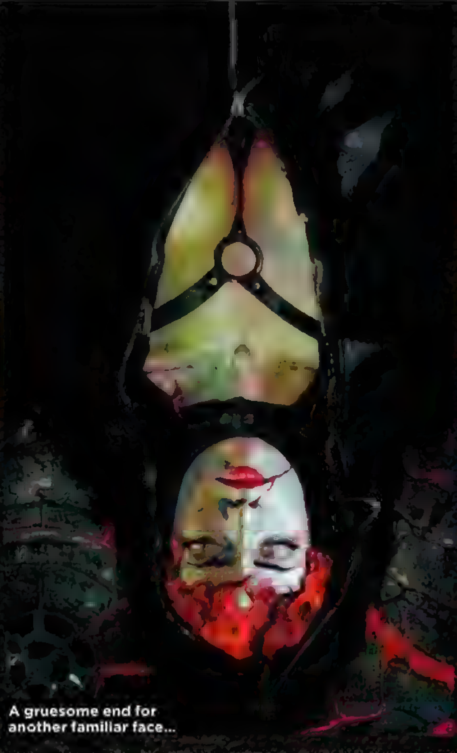
DAREDEVIL
END OF DAYS



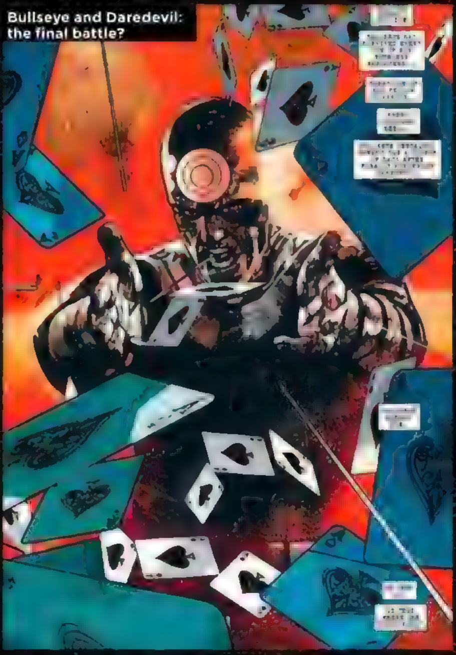
DAREDEVIL
END OF DAYS



Maleev's bloody cover art for *End Of Days* #5.



A gruesome end for another familiar face...



Bullseye and Daredevil: the final battle?

Daredevil artists, they're also multimedia experts – so it's not just a case of one pencils and one inks or one paints. They can all do *everything*, so we thought it would be a waste to not allow everyone to use all of their different talents at some point in the story. The majority of it is Klaus pencilling and Bill inking – but sometimes Bill pencils and Klaus inks. We've also got both Alex Maleev and David Mack doing some covers and interior sequences too."

For his part, Sienkiewicz thrives on the freedom that inking brings.

"I really love doing inks or finishes over other artists, because it's like a window into their processes and thinking," he says. "It makes me feel like I've reached another level of understanding in how they do things. It's like a really rare opportunity to step into somebody else's subjective point of view, and hopefully add something as opposed to detracting from it. Certainly, working with Klaus it's all there, and my main goal is not to screw it up!"

Meanwhile, Bendis and Mack's co-writing process has also proved extremely fluid.

"It's changed from issue to issue, but we both feel that it's been, like, a great combination of us both, as we've each brought something to it," explains Mack. "At the beginning we would start by just having a conversation about what it was going to be like, and then we'd outline what the broad strokes of the whole thing will be – and the different beats per issue – before diving into the issue and finessing it back and forth."

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

A regular supporting character in Hornhead's life since debuting in 1978's *Daredevil* #153 in a story by Roger MacKenzie, Gene Colan and Tony DeZuniga, Ben Urich is very much at the heart of *End Of Days*.

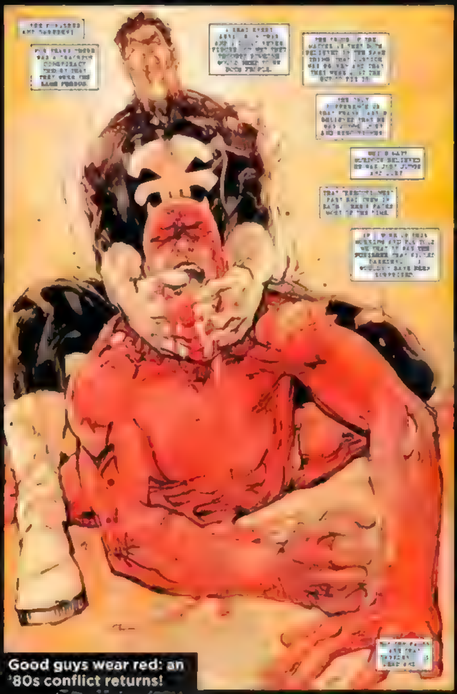
"He's obviously the stand-in for the reader, but he also represents the four of us," says Janson. "Or, at least, he does for me, as he's been my entry point back into it."

"The interesting thing about Daredevil, and everyone in Daredevil's world, is that none of them are normal," continues Mack. "They're all kind of crazy, and have a certain amount of issues. But Ben is, like, the most grounded person in the *entire* Marvel Universe. He's kind of like a semi-reliable narrator, as there are moments in the story where you realise that even Ben has blind spots. There's a point where the audience is almost like a step behind Ben – and then another where they'll start to speculate and go, 'I think *this* is what happened...' For the first time, they'll start to see things before Ben does."

> " I don't know how we're going to top this "

With shades of great literary protagonists like Othello – whose presence is very much felt before they even appear – the supposedly deceased Daredevil is actually out of the picture for large sections of *End Of Days*.

"We made some overt Shakespearian allusions in #6 with some references to *Hamlet*," notes Mack. "Matt Murdock's such a foreboding character, with his own gravity, that even when he's not there it's like there's a Daredevil-shaped black hole there instead. The rest of his world is defined by him, and each person Ben meets gives their own kind of Rashomon-style version of who Daredevil was."



Good guys wear red: an '80s conflict returns!

For his part, Janson has enjoyed returning to classic characters like Matt's college love-turned-doomed ninja warrior Elektra, whom he helped co-create in 1981's *Daredevil* #168.

"One of the great pleasures about the way that Brian and David have constructed this story is that we get to visit everybody," he says. "It was such an enjoyable experience to see what these characters are doing, how they've developed and what their state of mind is. And I get the feeling readers are enjoying it too."

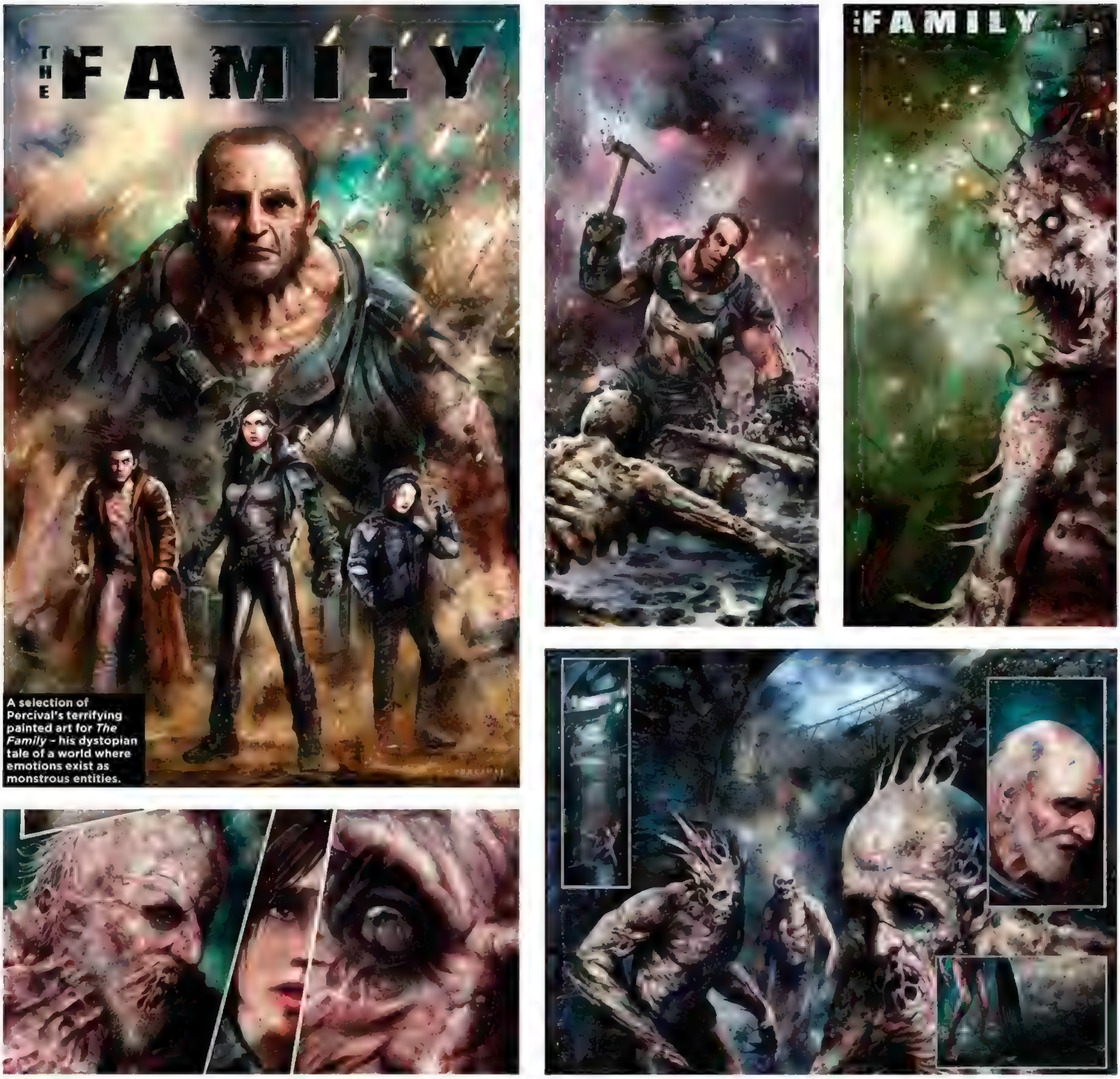
"It's not like a cookie-cutter approach," adds Mack. "Characters simply appear organically, as Daredevil's world is just *so* insane. It takes a toll on poor Ben, as every time he talks to somebody who has some kind of problem then the next time you see him, he takes on that same problem. He talks to Melvin [the Gladiator], who's missing an arm and then he breaks his own arm; when he talks to Turk, who's missing an eye, his glasses get shattered soon after."

"I didn't even notice that at first, but that's the kind of stuff that's just so smart," continues Janson, who is looking forward to the series being collected in a handsome hardback in June. "With all the recurring themes, motifs and symbolism, it really benefits from more than one reading. I don't know how we're going to top this, and that's what scares me – which is why I don't have another assignment planned out."

Fortunately for Janson and Sienkiewicz, Mack has the ideal solution.

"When we were first starting this," he says, "Brian actually mentioned the idea that all of us – the same creative team – could follow it with another project. We thought maybe we could do something non-Daredevil related next time, a project we could approach in a fun way." **CH**

Daredevil: End Of Days concludes soon, and is collected in June.



A selection of Percival's terrifying painted art for *The Family* – his dystopian tale of a world where emotions exist as monstrous entities.

MODERN FAMILY

Artist and animation guy Nick Percival made a big splash at *2000 AD* in the '90s, painting major *Judge Dredd* and *Sláine* storylines before seeming to disappear. Now he's back with *The Family*, his most ambitious project yet… **By Matt Bielby**

The multi-skilled Nick Percival appeared to ditch comics after his '90s stint at *2000 AD*, turning to animation, work for games companies, and movie pre-production art. The truth is, however, that he never went far away – and in recent years he's returned refreshed, painting hefty original graphic novels that have gone down very well in France, in particular.

Like so many of us, Percival was brought up on European reprints of old Marvel and DC comics – "I was a big fan of John Byrne's *X-Men* and *Fantastic Four*, Frank Miller's *Daredevil* and Alan Davis on *Captain Britain* and *Marvelman*," he says – before finally getting into the EC horror comics and *2000 AD*, which have tended to inform his professional art.

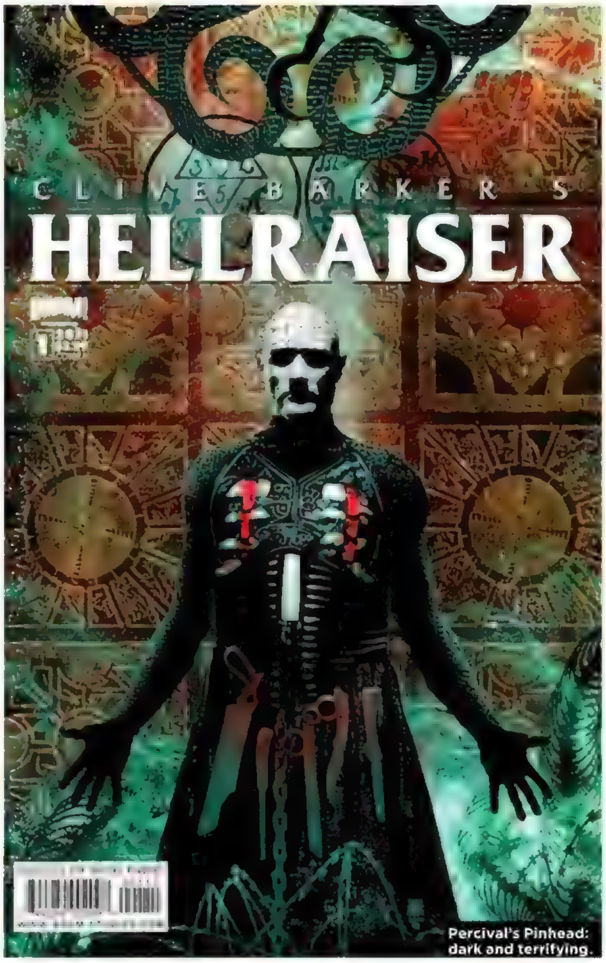
Dodging art college, he managed a comic shop in Sheffield, which gave him an in at *2000 AD*. "Eventually I pitched them a short story," he says, "and they hired me on the spot! That was later adapted into 'Monsters', my first published work in the *Judge Dredd Megazine*. On the train home, I remember deciding to quit my job at the comic book shop the next day, which I did."

Comic Heroes: Much of your early work was with Garth Ennis, on stories like the Jonni Kiss tales in *Judge Dredd*…

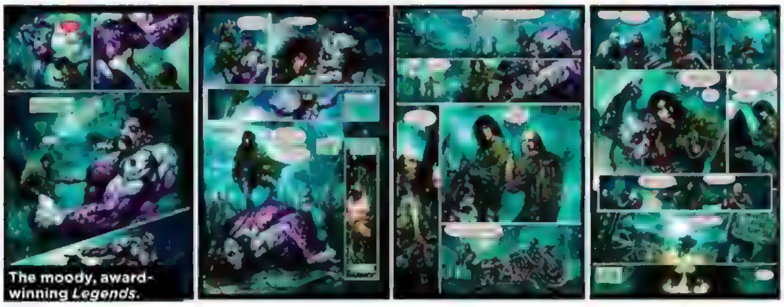
Nick Percival: I thoroughly enjoyed working with Garth. We're about the same age and

HALT!
ABSORBING THIS MUCH THRILL-POWER IS IN DIRECT VIOLATION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY LAWS, CREEPS!
2000 AD
PROG 1723
2000 AD
REPORT TO YOUR LOCAL CIRCUIT-READJUSTMENT CENTRE BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO READ

Percival started his career on *Judge Dredd*.



Percival's Pinhead: dark and terrifying.



The moody, award-winning *Legends*.

we have the same sense of humour. He was spending a lot of time in the States while I was working on his stuff, so – since this was before regular emails – we'd send letters back and forth. I really had the best time on the Dredd series we did, 'Goodnight Kiss'. It was his last major Dredd story, and – as he was getting into *Preacher* at the time – it had a Western type feel to it, set in the Cursed Earth with Dredd stranded. Lots of great images to paint!

> **“*The Family* is set in a world where bad feelings actually exist as real, creature-like entities”**

CH: You worked on *Sláine*, with Pat Mills – and those stories have just been collected. What was it like, following a pretty impressive stack of artists: Mike McMahon, Glenn Fabry, Simon Bisley et al?

NP: Those guys are all legends, so it was very daunting because the bar was set so high. I actually got the *Sláine* job on the strength of my *Dredd* art; one evening I had a phone call out of the blue with a voice saying, 'Hi, this is Pat Mills. I'd like to talk about *Sláine*.' I was like, 'Er… okay.'

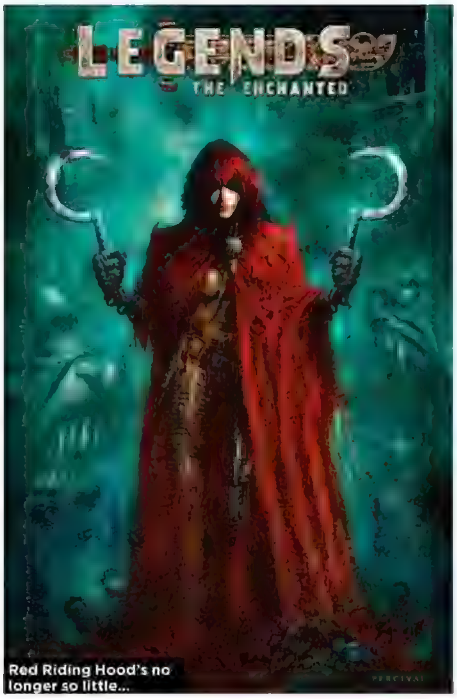
Pat was great with all the reference materials I needed, and he has a fantastic historical knowledge that he feeds into all his *Sláine* material – you learn so much from him after these lengthy phone conversations. My story featured Sláine meeting William Wallace, and this was not long after the *Braveheart* film had been released, so the visual influences are obvious. To be honest, I was hoping for more fantasy elements – but this was when Sláine was very much in his 'real world' phase, travelling through time and hooking up with various figures from world history. I wanted to paint monsters, horror, fantasy battles.

I'd like to revisit *Sláine* at some point, perhaps with a short story or something. Pat and I have had very loose emails about it over the years, so who knows?

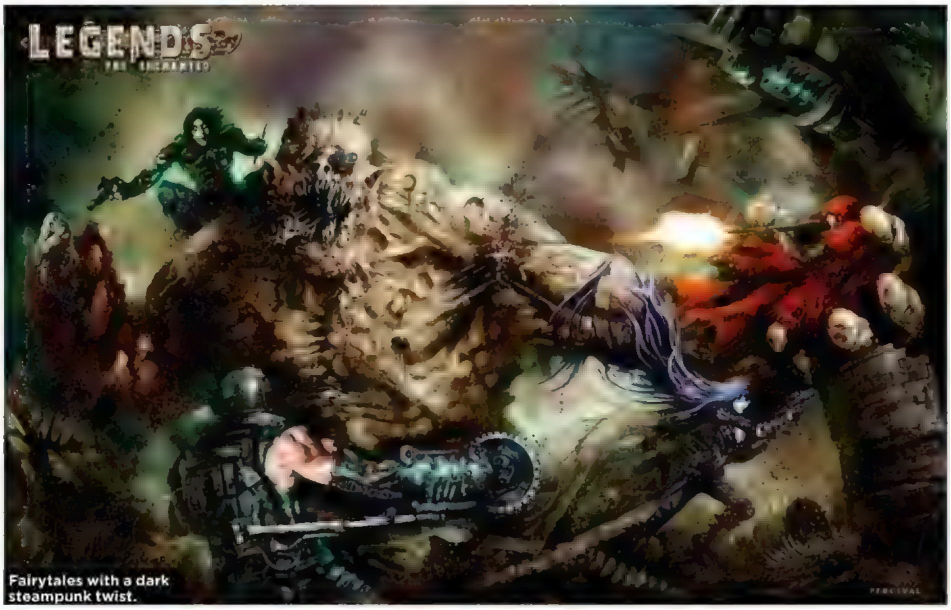
CH: You came in at the peak of the painted artwork phase in *2000 AD*, and comics in general. How do you feel about that now?

NP: Yeah, it was both a blessing and a curse. When it was done well, you'd get some great-looking art – but I think all of us at that time were guilty of painting in similar styles, using similar techniques, and everything kind of looked the same. And the paper quality was so poor in *2000 AD* that a lot of the work looked like mud when it was printed, which didn't help.

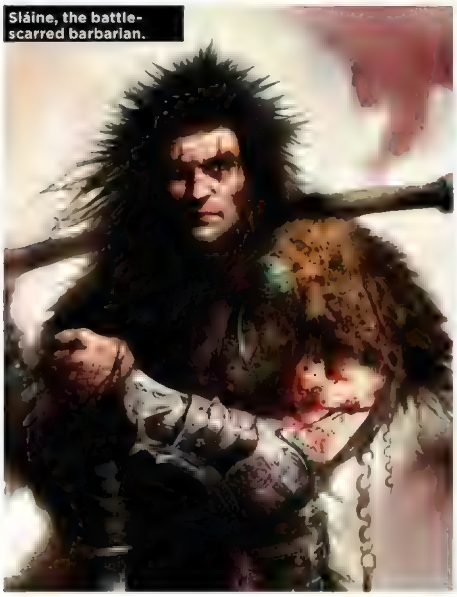
We were all obviously Bisley fans and wore our influences all over our sleeves, but it was a case of learning as you went along, making all your mistakes in public – I guess you have to go through that process. Fully painted »



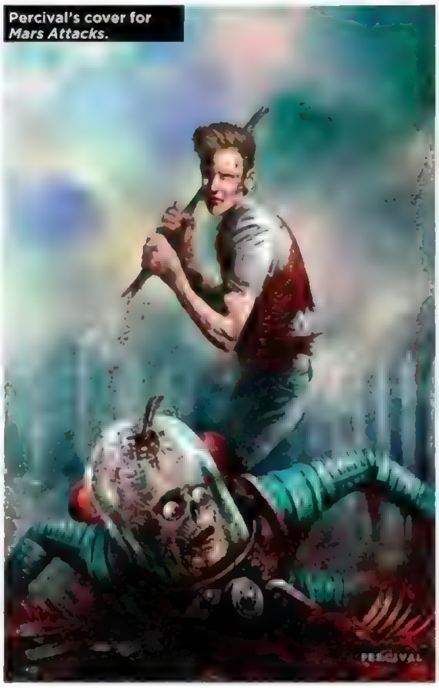
Red Riding Hood's no longer so little...



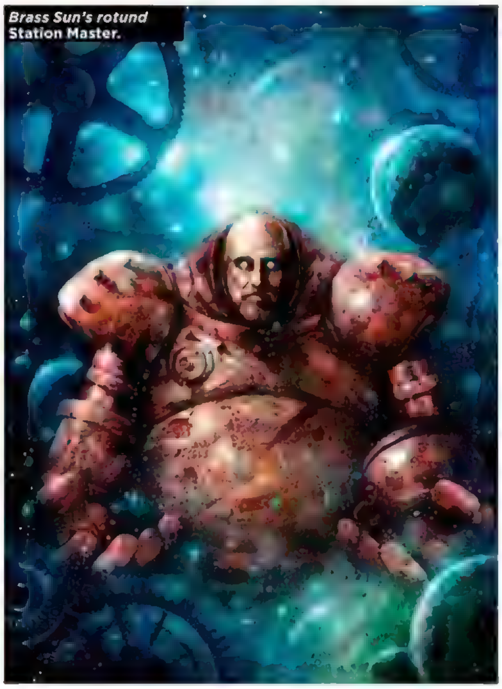
Fairytales with a dark steampunk twist.



Sláine, the battle-scarred barbarian.



Percival's cover for *Mars Attacks*.



Brass Sun's rotund Station Master.

pages took me about three or four days back then – I'm faster now, thank God! What it did lead to was me getting heavily into some of the older artists like Frank Frazetta, Richard Corben and Bernie Wrightson, and that led me to Norman Rockwell, Caravaggio and so on.

CH: You've done lots of work for gaming companies, and I believe even ran an animation studio. Are you a big gamer?
NP: Well, in the sense that I buy lots of videogames, put them on the shelf – and then never get around to playing them! I left comics for a while and concentrated on CG animation, which grew into running a fairly large studio. It opened a lot of doors in the film industry, but took me away from the drawing board. Doing that kind of digital work gave me a better understanding of what you can achieve in art with lighting, textures and FX, though, and helped with my approach to storytelling. It's all art to me, whatever the methods used to create it.

CH: In comics, what characters have you particularly enjoyed? And which would you like to explore, given the chance?
NP: I do a lot of painted cover work, which I can fit in around my own graphic novel projects and film work. I love doing them, since it's all about one strong image to sell the book, and the variety of subject matter and genre is great. I do seem to get a lot of horror themed covers put my way, but that's fine with me.

I just completed a two-year run as regular cover artist on BOOM's *Hellraiser* titles, as well as a bunch of covers for IDW's new *Judge Dredd* title, plus *Mars Attacks*, *X-Files*, HP Lovecraft stuff and, of course, I still paint covers for *2000 AD* now and again. I actually painted a couple of covers for the horror magazine *Fangoria*, which I had a blast with – I've been a fan of it for years.

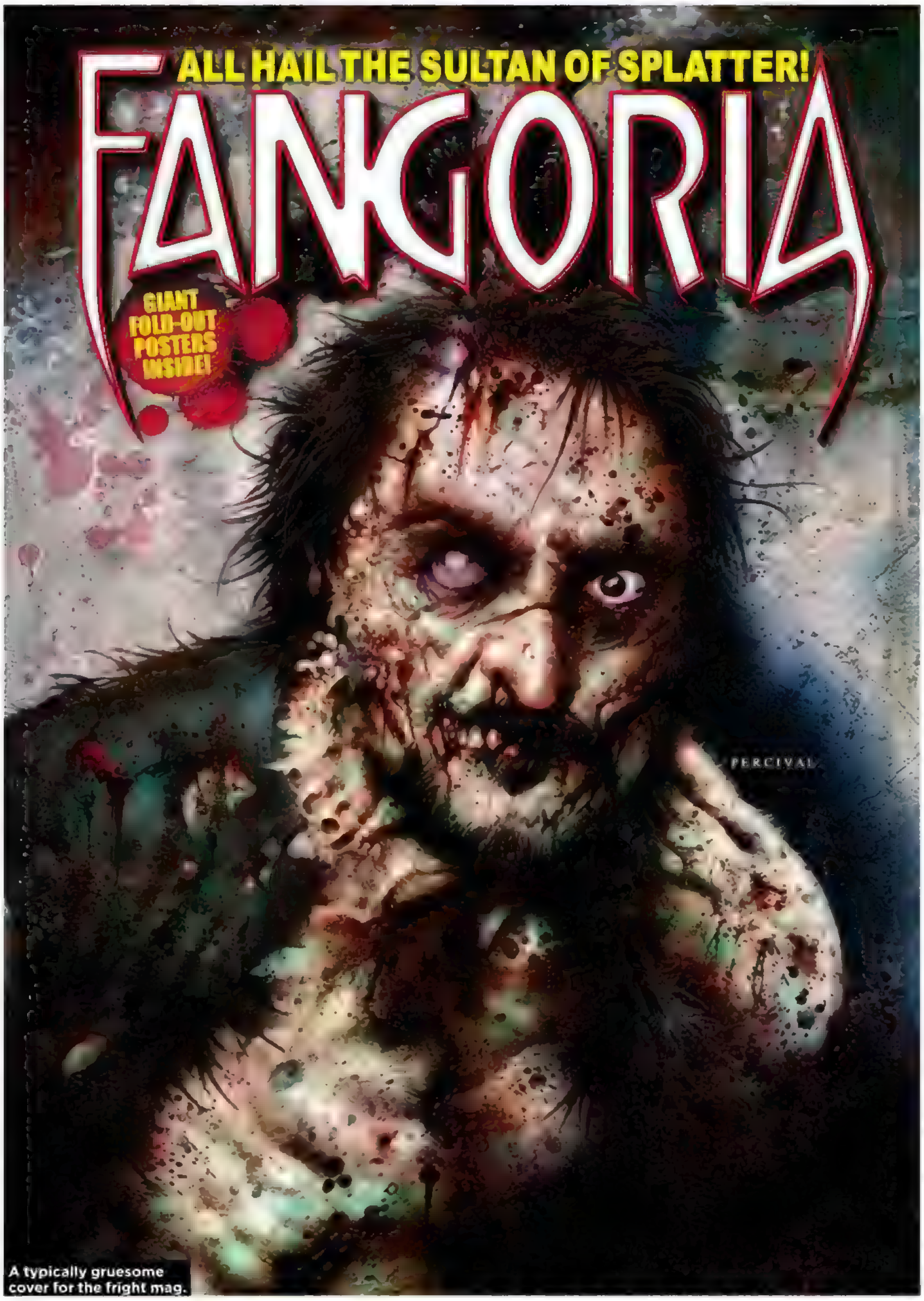
Aside from my own original projects, there's a horror-themed Hulk story locked away that I'd love to paint some day. I did some horror stuff for Marvel a few years ago – it was a revival of the old '70s title *Dead Of Night*, under the adults-only Marvel Max imprint – that was a riff on the classic EC horror comics style, but Hulk's the only major Marvel character I'd really love to do.

As for other creators, I know he gets a lot of flak these days, but I quite like Mark Millar's work – it's always entertaining. The very first *Dredd* strip I painted was a Mark Millar script, funnily enough.

CH: Tell us about *Legends: The Enchanted* – how did that come about?
NP: It started out as a film script that I'd written in about 2002, and supported with a bunch of concept art, mood boards and production paintings. My managers in LA took it out to various studios and directors, and I had the weird honour of being turned down by directors like Wolfgang Petersen, Robert Zemeckis and David Fincher – who thought it was too dark and gritty!

Legends was pitched as 'X-Men meets Brothers Grimm', with the famous characters from fairytales and folklore teaming up after they find the charred remains of the supernatural warrior, Pinocchio. They realise something is picking them off one by one, so they reluctantly band together to face this threat – which turns out to be a superpowerful Hag-type creature and her son, the Troll from under the bridge, who is linked to all their famous tales.

Unlike traditional fairytales, however, it was set in a post-apocalyptic type industrial world, complete with customised motorbikes,


ALL HAIL THE SULTAN OF SPLATTER!
FANGORIA
GIANT FOLD-OUT POSTERS INSIDE!
PERCIVAL

A typically gruesome cover for the fright mag.

> **“There’s a horror-themed Hulk story locked away that I’d love to paint some day”**

hi-tech weapons and so on. For example, Jack the Giant Killer takes Magic Beans, with each different colour granting him different powers for a limited amount of time. Goldilocks is a bounty hunter who is partnered with Bear, a half-man/half-bear bodyguard creature.

As all this was going on, Radical Publishing got in touch about financing it as their first original hardcover graphic novel. So I ended up rewriting most of it, and spent over a year painting the book. I’d written a few other film scripts that got passed around various studios, but this was the first complete project that all came together; getting the Eagle Award nomination in 2010 was a real surprise, and pretty cool for my first solo effort.

The graphic novel ended up being optioned by Ron Howard, and has been moving along at the usual snail’s pace of Hollywood development. It’s weird because, since I did the book, we now have loads of dark, twisted takes on fairytales on TV and cinema, so maybe it’s already had its day – or maybe that’ll help if the studios feel there’s money to be made. Movies are a strange business.

CH: And now there’s *The Family*, a second original graphic novel...

NP: This is a much deeper and more personal project than *Legends*. *The Family* deals with a lot of themes I’ve wanted to explore, particularly the extreme effects and power of different emotions. I decided to set it in a world where all kinds of bad feelings actually exist as real, tangible, creature-like entities. These things are able to infect people and pass on rage, guilt, fear, panic, deceit and malice, while at the same time draining elements like compassion, love and empathy from anyone they come into contact with. They are so powerful that these entities twist beyond recognition familiar landmarks and landscapes, and the world is brutally reshaped in their image as Panic Attacks, Rage Storms and Floods of Tears devastate the Earth.

So when four seemingly unrelated individuals cross paths in this hostile new land, a unique bond is forged: known only as Father, Mother, Son and Daughter, they’re the ‘Family’ of the series. The focus is on a small group of conflicted characters, and how they react and respond to what’s going on. It’s all about survival.

CH: So is it set in an apocalyptic future, or what? And when can we read it?

NP: I purposely didn’t want to make it too clear at this point whether it’s a near-future version of our world, or a different place entirely, since the story will take place over six volumes. I’ve treated the whole thing like a TV series, with each volume reading like a season in terms of pacing and the drip-feeding of information. I hope people will give it a shot and stay with it. Volume 1 will be released in hardcover by Nickel Editions in France late spring/early summer 2013 as: *‘La Famille: Cruel Prelude’* (*The Family: Cruel Beginnings*).

The first English edition is then likely to be serialised in *Heavy Metal* later in the year, followed by the first English trade paperback volume early next year. There should be a new volume out each year after that; I’m in it for the long haul.

CH: What’s the technical process behind your art now?

NP: Most of my work now is produced digitally. I still paint traditionally for private commissions, and will maybe do the odd cover that way, but – for me – digital is faster and more flexible. I still draw with pencil on paper to start with, scan the artwork and then paint on the computer, employing the same techniques as traditional painting – but now I can also add a lot of texture work and lighting effects – if it looks good on the final page, that’s all that matters to me in the end. Pages take up to two days, depending on the content.

CH: So, are original graphic novels now your favoured medium?

NP: I think so, and certainly for large projects. When you write and paint your own material, you can start to try different things with storytelling techniques. I’m not knocking writers who don’t illustrate, but sometimes you get scripts where there are way too many panels on a page, or a ton of dialogue to fit in, which can clutter the art and damage the flow of the story.

I remain very disciplined in the way that I write – and still draft full scripts to work from. I like to know where the story is going, and I think if you don’t write it all out, it’s far too easy to become self-indulgent or cut corners. The work Frank Miller did on the early *Sin City* stories was the perfect combination of script and art to my mind, and as both writer and artist I can try to emulate that. CH

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*Following **The Family**, Nick Percival has an online comics project planned; find out more at www.nickpercival.com.*

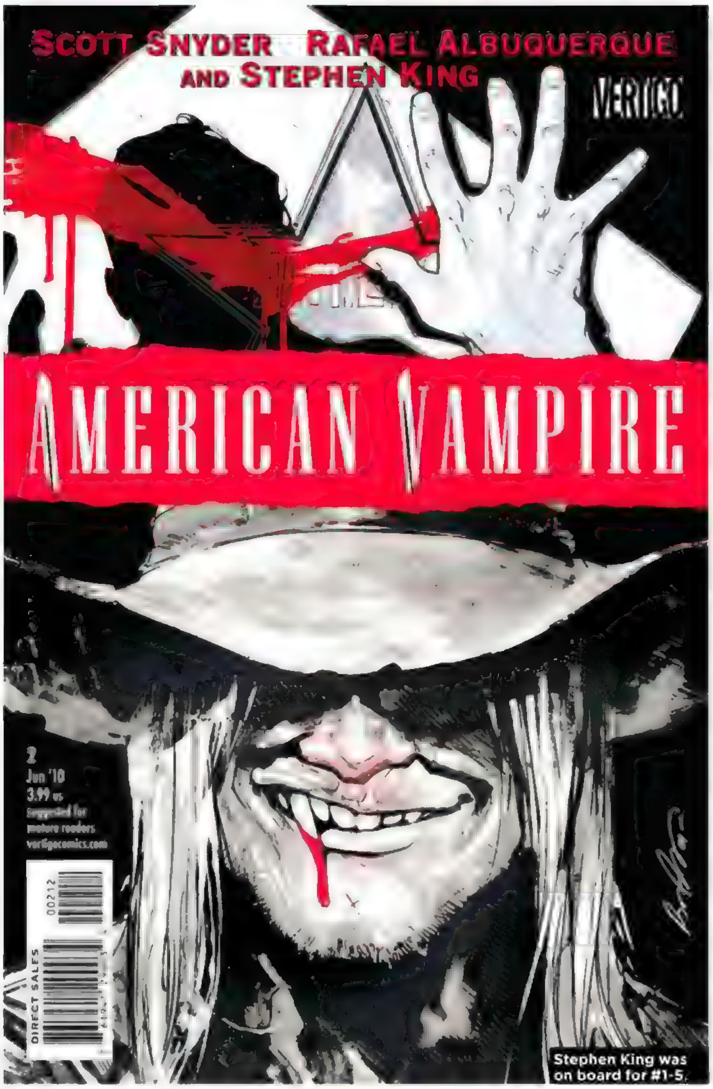
MAN OF TOMORROW

Has anyone ever risen to prominence in comics quite as fast as Scott Snyder? He's gone from nowhere to as-big-as-it-gets in three years or so – and with a new *Superman* project teaming him with one of the biggest artists in the industry, things show no sign of slowing down yet... **By Joel Meadows**

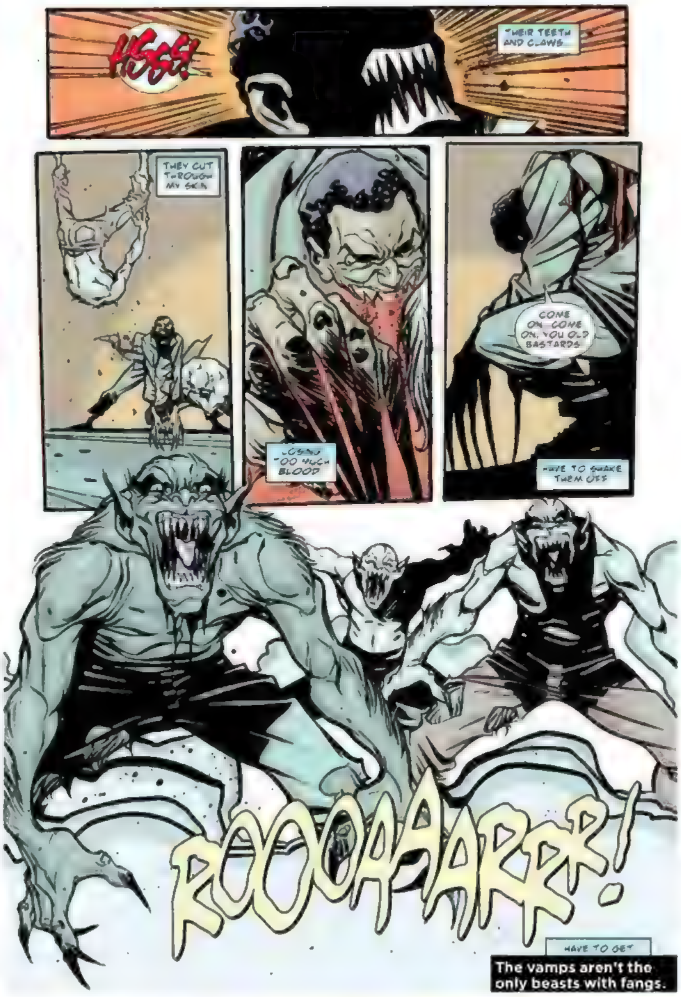
Remember the world before Scott Snyder? No, us neither – but it really wasn't that long ago. Snyder's become one of DC's pivotal writers in a pretty short period, first coming to prominence when he co-created Vertigo's *American Vampire* horror series with artist Rafael Albuquerque in 2010, and then staking out his territory across a vast swathe of the regular DC Universe too.

Snyder has a degree in Creative Writing from Brown University – one of the top Ivy League institutions – and an MFA from Columbia; he won prizes for his short stories, teaches creative writing on the side, and contributed a few bits and bobs to Marvel – notably the miniseries *Iron Man: Noir* – before DC made his name. Now one of the biggest noises in mainstream comics – thanks to work on *Detective Comics* and, in particular, as writer of both *Batman* and *Swamp Thing* as part of DC's New 52 initiative – he's an endless engine of energy and smart ideas, ensuring these much-loved characters remain must-see books for a vast percentage of the comic-reading world.

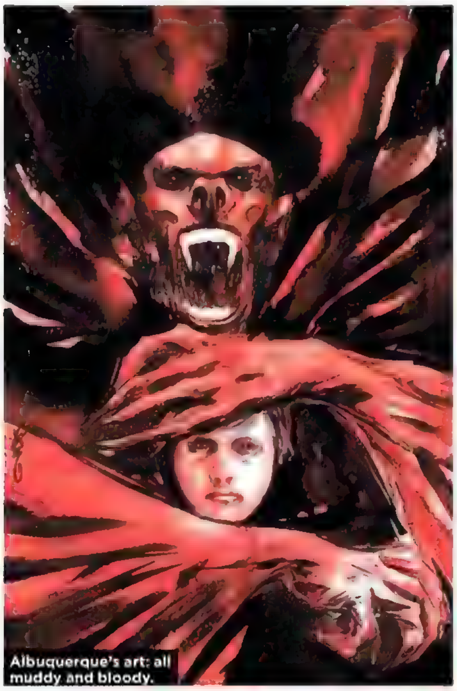
So sure, he left *Swamp Thing* with #18 – and *American Vampire* has gone on hiatus, to return later in the year – but the work rate has in no way slowed up. In May, Vertigo launches *The Wake* – a new 12-part series that teams Snyder with Sean (*Punk Rock Jesus*) Murphy – and he continues to guide the life of Batman in his eponymous


SCOTT SNYDER RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE
AND STEPHEN KING
VERTIGO
AMERICAN VAMPIRE
2
Jun '10
3.99 US
Suggested for mature readers
vertigocomics.com
DIRECT SALES

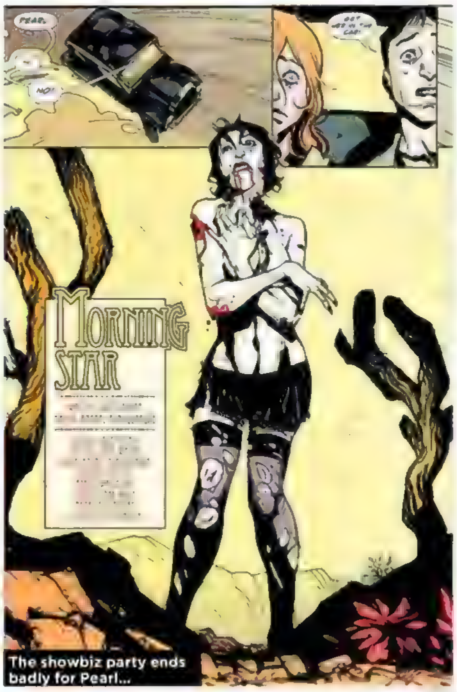
Stephen King was on board for #1-5.


HSSS!
THEIR TEETH AND CLAWS
THEY CUT THROUGH MY SKIN
COME ON COME ON, YOU OLD BASTARDS
LOSING TOO MUCH BLOOD
HAVE TO SHAKE THEM OFF
ROOOAAARRR!
HAVE TO GET

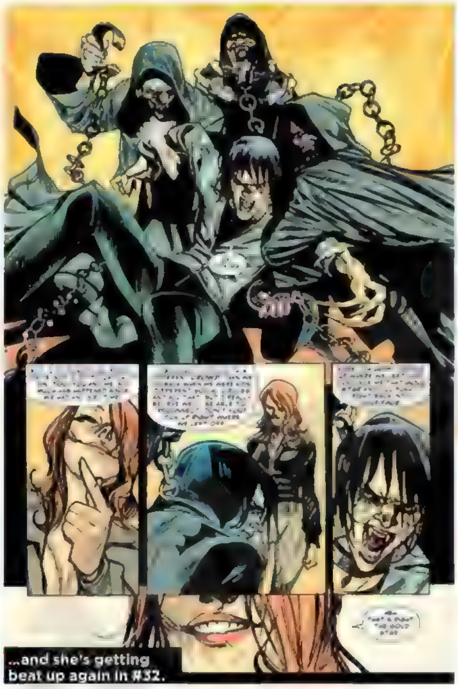
The vamps aren't the only beasts with fangs.



Albuquerque's art: all muddy and bloody.


PEARL
NO!
GET IN THE CAR!
MORNING STAR

The showbiz party ends badly for Pearl...



...and she's getting beat up again in #32.

title, continuing his ongoing collaboration with artist Greg Capullo.

On top of that, DC launches *Superman Unchained* in June, a new ongoing series written by Snyder, and drawn by Jim Lee, to tie in with the character's 75th anniversary.

We caught up with Snyder to find out just how he manages to juggle all this work, his feelings about leaving *Swamp Thing*, and the luxury of jumping from creator-owned series to iconic superheroes such as DC's biggest guns...

Comic Heroes: *American Vampire* is on a break as of #34, but the promise is that it'll return soon. How far are you and Rafael along with plotting out the second part?

Scott Snyder: Oh, we're well into it. We already know the big beats of the two arcs after the hiatus – and look for some special material to show up *during* the hiatus, too.

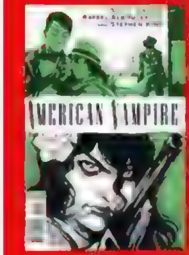
We're at about the halfway point in the whole *American Vampire* story, and if the series' first half was really about opening up the world we've created – bringing in more species, exploring further the mythology and the vampire history, adding new characters – then the second half is about moving all the characters and storylines closer together, bringing everything to a head.

CH: How surprised have you been by the success of the series?

SS: I knew we'd get off to a good start with Stephen King on board as co-writer – the first »

GREAT SCOTTS

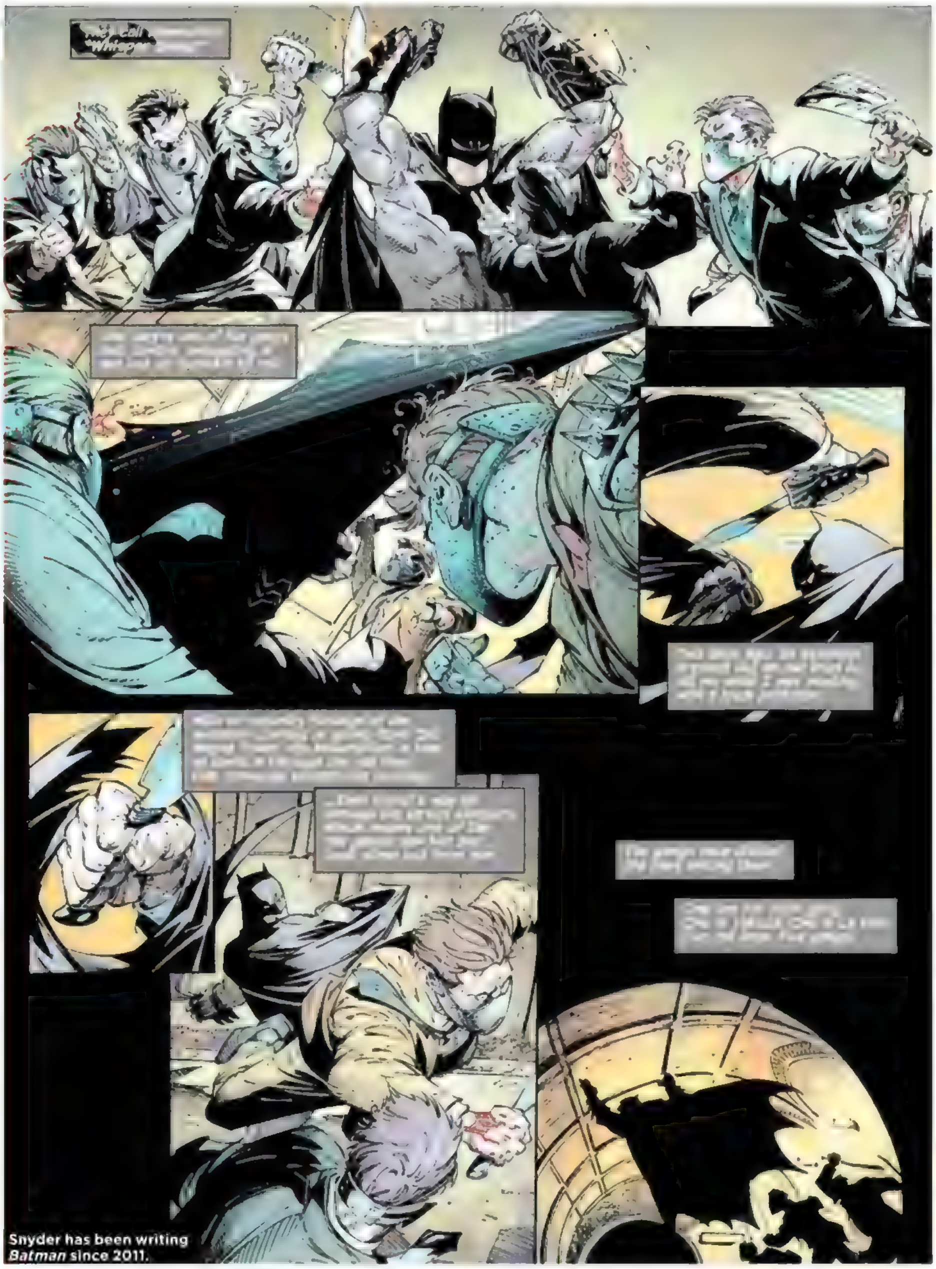
At the beginning of 2010 we hadn't even *heard* of him. But in the few years since, Scott Snyder has made quite a name for himself in the world of comics. Here's the pick of his impressive body of work so far, out in trade paperback...



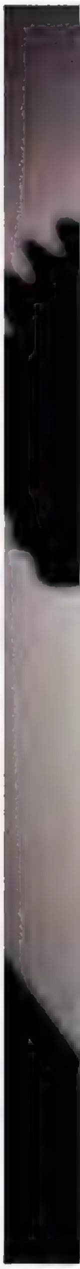
American Vampire
As of writing, there have been five volumes of Snyder's unique, Eisner Award-winning take on the bloodsucking horror icons. Heaving with Americana, and shifting the idea of the vampire away from the Victorian gothic, the series has been one of Vertigo's best-received titles of recent years: there are two leads – outlaw bad boy Skinner Sweet, the first 'American vampire' (a new breed, with different powers and such) and his creation, Pearl Jones, who we first meet as a struggling '20s actress – but dozens of characters interact with these two as we follow them through the 20th century. There's clearly real chemistry between Snyder and the regular artist on the series, Rafael Albuquerque, which lends *American Vampire* a tone all of its own.

Batman
Snyder, collaborating with artist Greg Capullo (*Quasar*, *X-Force*), has written one of the most consistent of DC's New 52 line, offering a take on the Dark Knight Detective that feels fresh and compelling. He has introduced a number of new characters and ideas into the Batman mythos that feel contemporary yet timeless, and fit perfectly with the character's canon – no mean feat – including the fan-favourite Court of Owls. Surprisingly gruesome at times, but clearly crafted with real love, respect, attention to detail – and glee.

Swamp Thing
The Scott Snyder approach to DC's most famous muck monster has been to give the book a very contemporary feel while remaining true to its classic horror roots: indeed, his 18-issue run has been a recent high-water mark for *Swamp Thing*, showing that – at its best – the one-time Vertigo characters can fit neatly again into the mainstream DCU without losing any of their vitality or ability to shock.



Snyder has been writing *Batman* since 2011.



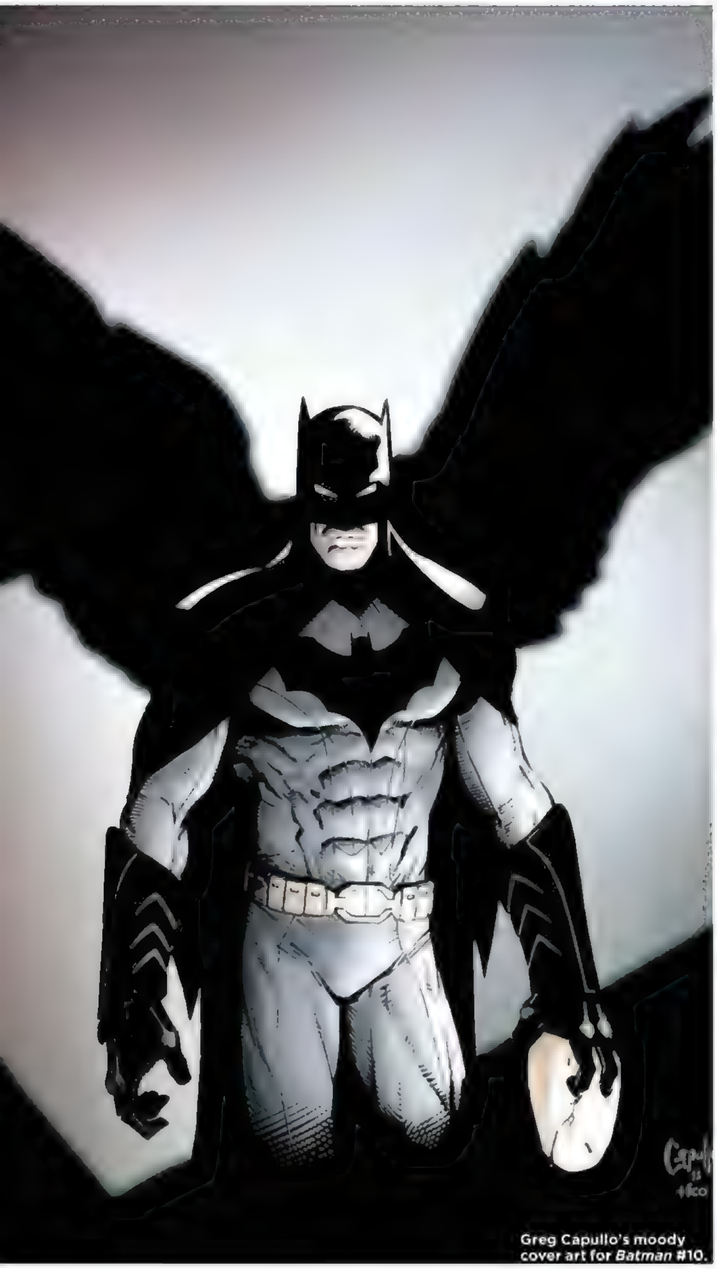
five issues were broken into two stories, one by me and another by Stephen, fleshing out the series' background – but I was hugely relieved and excited when we were able to sustain the series' success after his departure.

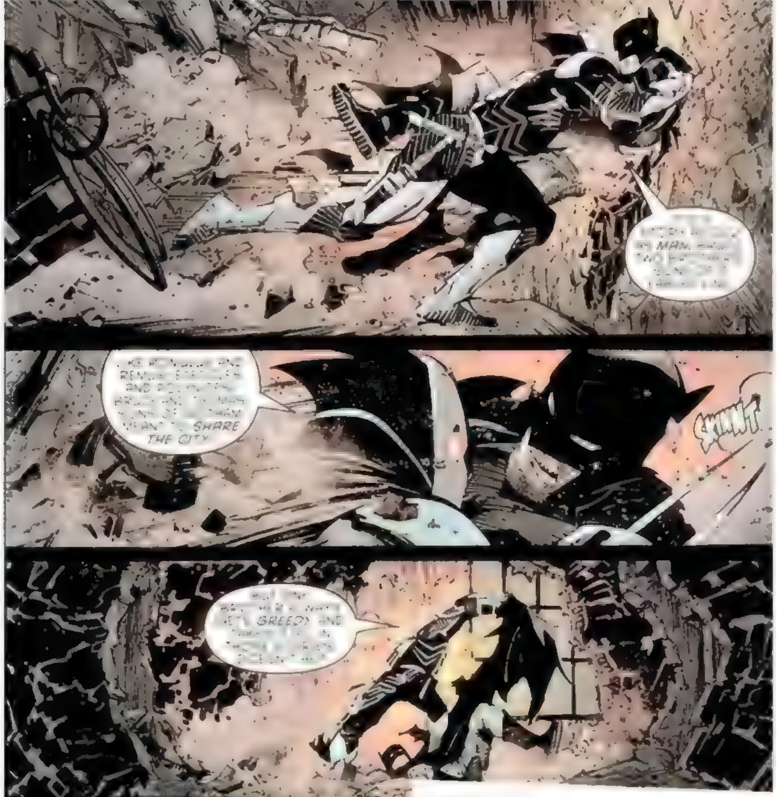
CH: Tell us about *The Wake* with artist Sean Murphy; it's out on the same imprint, but it's a miniseries rather than an ongoing one...
SS: Yes, I thought it would be really hard to write two ongoing creator-owned series, because they require so much world building. Everything in them is your creation, and – for me – it'd be too much trying to build two fully imagined worlds at once. So *The Wake* is shorter. It's a sci-fi/horror series that centres on a discovery made at the bottom of the ocean that offers up some pretty scary and surprising revelations about myths of the sea. Also, from page one, it'll be very different to anything you've ever seen by me. Promise! And Sean's art is just incredible.

CH: You worked with Murphy before, of course – on the spin-off miniseries *American Vampire: Survival Of The Fittest*, and on issues of the ongoing series. Clearly you have a rapport with him?
SS: Oh yes. I'd been a fan from before that – from his work on the Vertigo series *Joe The Barbarian*, for instance – and I could see in that book how amazing he was at world building, and how rich he made the narrative space. I loved all the details in the background, the layers of story there... Anyway, we got in touch and we went on a double date and really got along. Now we're good friends.

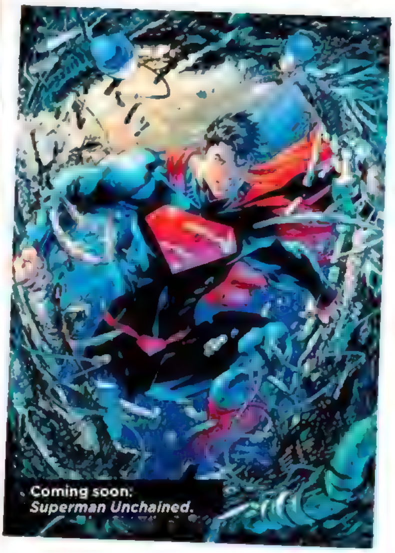
CH: You're still writing *Batman*, of course. Any signs you might be running out of steam on the character yet?
SS: Not at all, and I'll definitely be writing *Batman* for the foreseeable future. The stories we have planned now take us through nearly to the end of 2014, for one thing. I've got at least two more big *Batman* stories in me; the first starts in issue #21.

CH: You're also working with Jim Lee on a new Superman series. What's your approach with this version of the character?
SS: Well, one thing we're exploring is the heroism of Clark's restraint. Meaning, the way Clark refuses to reshape the world as he sees fit, but instead allows us to either build it or ruin it ourselves. Ultimately, for me, this moral compass of his is what makes him sometimes feel so alone. It's not his heritage, or power set, but his morals. The way he chooses to do what he believes, as the child of the


Greg Capullo's moody cover art for *Batman* #10.


The 'Court Of Owls' epic reaches its climax.

Scott Snyder: his star is in the ascendance.


Coming soon: *Superman Unchained*.

> **❝ I feel like our final issue really ends the story in the place I'd always intended to go ❞**

Kents, is right, despite pressure or public opinion or consequence. It's funny commuting from Gotham to Metropolis, though. The rain stops, the clouds part…

CH: As DC's co-publisher, your artist on this – Jim Lee – has an insane amount to do. How have you found working with someone who is both a working artist and also one of the most senior people at DC?
SS: Ha! Well, it's true that he does have a wild schedule, but he's an animal when he sits down at the drafting table. He often works late at night, so I wake up to these amazing pages.

CH: Is your work on the Superman book a finite story, or are you on it for the long haul?
SS: Honestly, I'm not sure right now. This story we're doing is big and will last a while, so I imagine I'll see if another one comes to me soon, and then play it by ear.

CH: You just left *Swamp Thing*, after 18 issues with penciller Yanick Pacquette. Do you feel that you've managed to do everything you wanted to with the character?
SS: Honestly, I feel pretty satisfied with what we achieved. My whole idea was to return *Swamp Thing* to Alec Holland, and to explore the unknown background of the character. Why him? Did he know Swamp Thing was waiting for him, the mantle? How did he feel about that?

I wanted to bring the character from this place of denial and anger about his own nature and destiny to a place of acceptance. And I feel like our final issue really ends the story in the place I'd always intended to go. I really hope everyone feels that way upon reading it too.

CH: You have written Batman and you've written Superman – and on major projects too – which is pretty damn impressive for a writer with a relatively short career. How does that feel?
SS: I feel incredibly lucky and intimidated and excited and grateful – and so many other things, I suppose. I really *do* have a hard time believing it. All I can say is thank you to the fans, and to DC for giving me the chance. And, also, I promise you that I'll do my best for these characters.

CH: What's the difference between writing *Batman* and something smaller and creator-owned, like *American Vampire*, say?
SS: Well, one allows me to imagine these big stories with very particular constraints and expectations on them. The other lets me write with total abandon. I enjoy both tremendously – and it's important to me to continue to do both. They balance each other.

CH: Are there any other big superheroes you'd still like to tackle?
SS: Oh, sure. Wonder Woman is top of my list. But also Flash, Batgirl. Lots! CH

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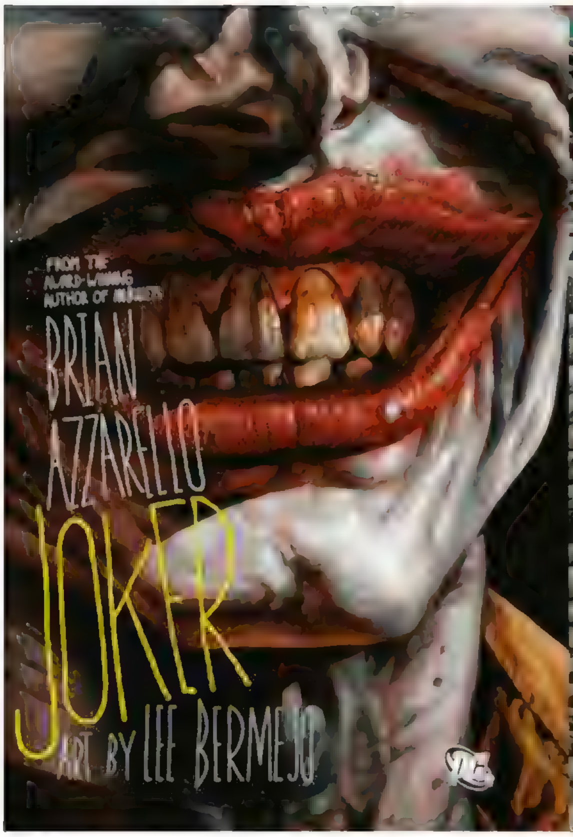
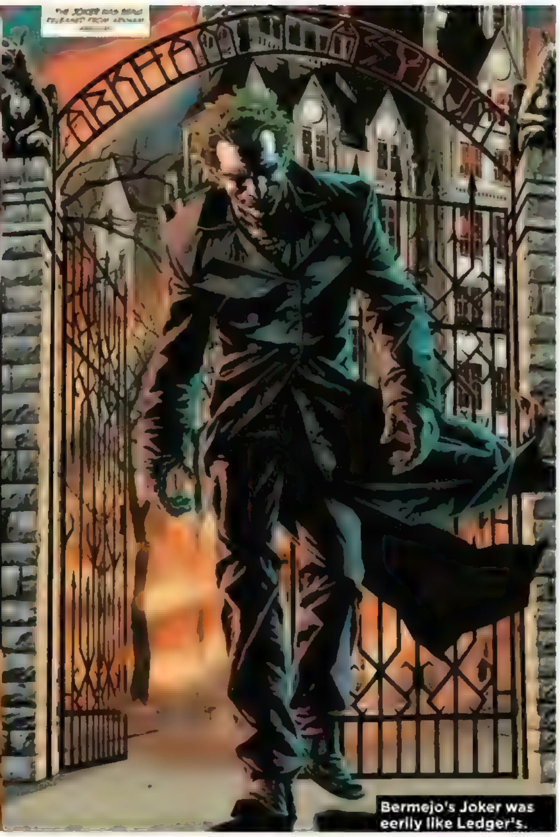
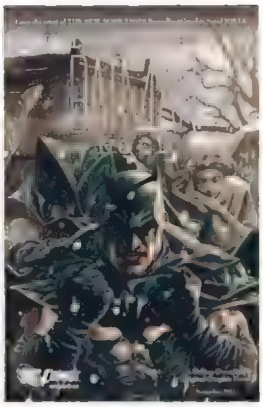
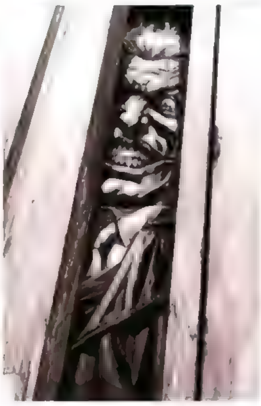
*Scott Snyder and Jim Lee's **Superman Unchained** hits comic shops on June 12, tying in almost exactly with the release of the new Superman movie, **Man Of Steel**.*



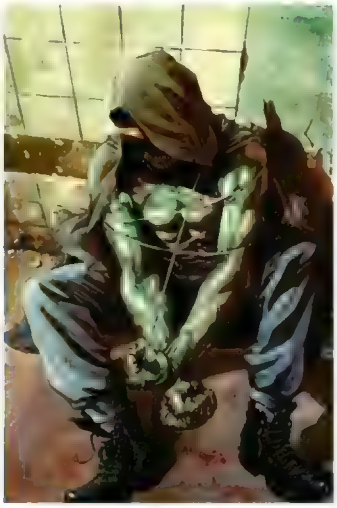


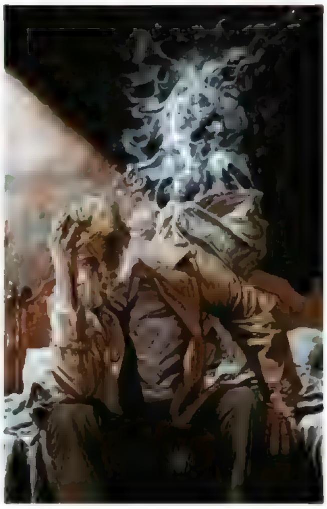
Bermejo's Joker was eerily like Ledger's.





POOR BRUISED WORLD





Lee Bermejo enjoyed little formal art training, but demonstrates raw talent by the bucketload; his is a love of the hyper-realistic and the romantically soiled... **By David Currie**

Ohio's Lee Bermejo brought a chilling smile to the Clown Prince of Crime – and stunned the comic book world – a few years back with his *Joker* original graphic novel and its eye-grabbing, Heath Ledger-predicting, fully-painted art. He's not fast, and hasn't produced all that many comics – the 2005 miniseries *Lex Luthor: Man Of Steel* and the more recent *Batman: Noel* graphic novel are the other main ones – but his style is knock-out, and hard to forget: realistic yet stylised, ugly yet romantic, retro yet very now. Everything in 'Lee Bermejo World' seems to suffer from puffy skin and purple and brown discolouring, like millions of tiny capillaries have burst just below the surface.

His work seems to chime, particularly, with what movie types are now doing with superheroes – his versions of Superman seem bathed in the same glowing sepia light as the upcoming *Man Of Steel* film, for instance, just as his Joker predicted *The Dark Knight* to an almost unbelievable degree.

Swimming against the digitally-coloured tide, each Lee Bermejo page is painstakingly created old-school, on boards as physical pages; unsurprisingly, some of his projects are years in production.

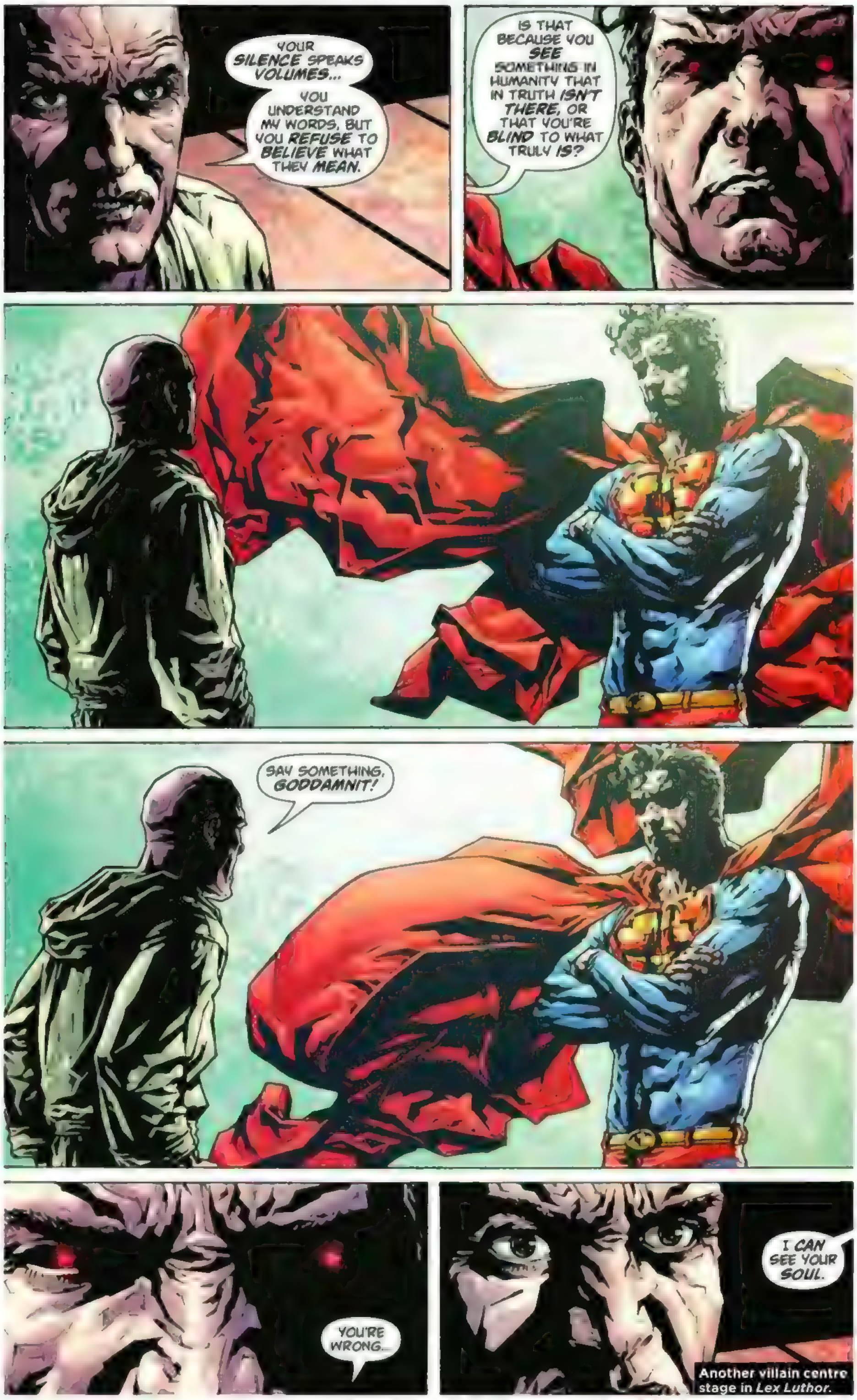
Lee is currently bringing his unflinchingly, ultra-realistic, gritty painted style to the *Before Watchmen: Rorschach* series – alongside writer Brian Azzarello – and his artistic star is very much on the rise...

Comic Heroes: What's your origin story? Were you a comic reader as a child?

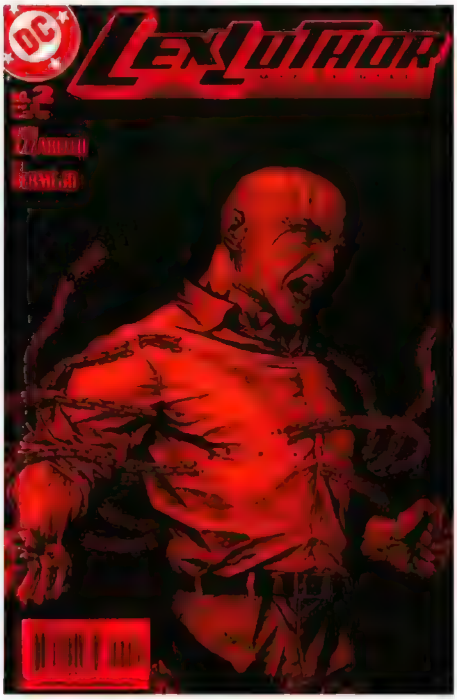
Lee Bermejo: I was born in Ohio and lived there until I was six, then my folks eventually moved out to California when I was around 10. I was reading *Star Wars* and *Batman* comics – and I remember my Mom buying me *Batman* and *Spider-Man* when I was a kid. When I moved to California, I discovered the concept of the comic book store – and the guys there educated me to the fact that there were *writers and artists* doing these comics.

CH: Which ones grabbed your attention?

LB: One of the first I remember seeing was the cover to the *Daredevil: Love And War* graphic novel by Bill Sienkiewicz; also, Howard


YOUR *SILENCE* SPEAKS *VOLUMES*...
YOU UNDERSTAND MY WORDS, BUT YOU *REFUSE* TO *BELIEVE* WHAT THEY *MEAN*.
IS THAT BECAUSE YOU *SEE* SOMETHING IN HUMANITY THAT IN TRUTH *ISN'T THERE*, OR THAT YOU'RE *BLIND* TO WHAT TRULY *IS?*
SAY SOMETHING, *GODDAMNIT!*
YOU'RE WRONG...
I CAN SEE YOUR SOUL.

Another villain centre stage in *Lex Luthor*.


DC
LEX LUTHOR
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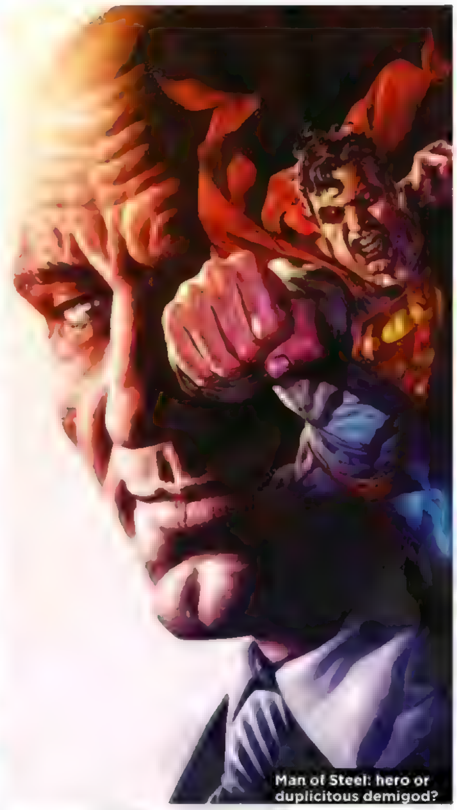

Man of Steel: hero or duplicitous demigod?

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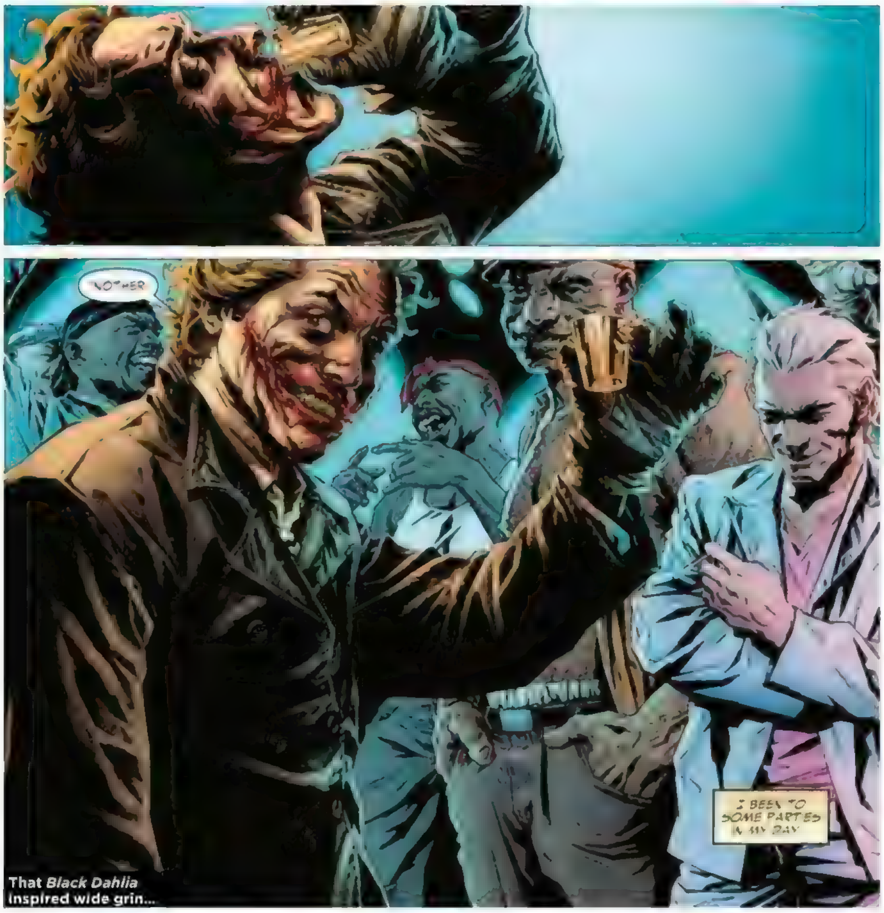
Chaykin's *The Shadow* series with the painted covers appealed to me. And then my eyes were really opened when my grandma bought me the trade paperback of Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. After a while, though, I was reading less and less standard superhero fare and more stuff like *Wasteland* and those early DC mature readers books. Then, with the whole Image Comics boom – at age 13 or 14 – I shifted back into following all that. I was dazzled by all the bright lights and shiny objects!

> **“ I'd just read Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*, and that helped to visually inspire the Joker ”**

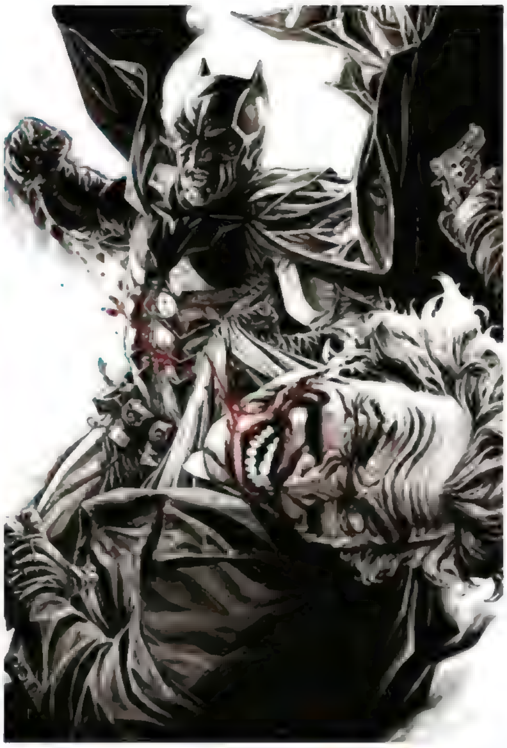
CH: So how did you get your foot in the door of the comics industry?

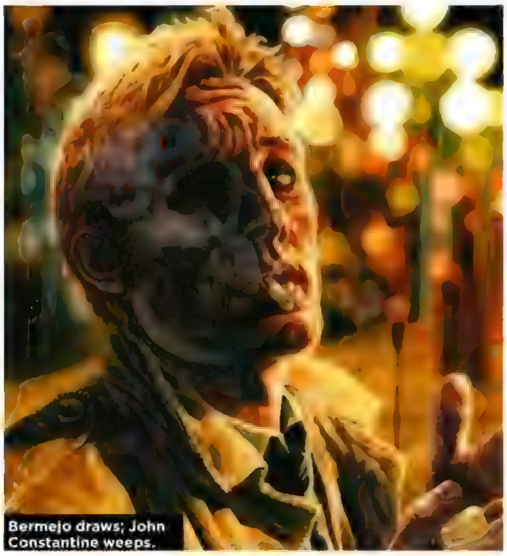
LB: In 1997, aged 18, I got hired as an intern at Wildstorm Comics in its consumer product division. It handled licensed product toys and game tie-ins. They were starting the younger guys out in that department – it was kind of grunt work really, but great experience in drawing a variety of different things. After that I was biting at the bit to do comic books, and achieved that in 1998 in Wildstorm's *Resident Evil* magazine – that was my first published comic work. It was just black and white linework; a few years later I'd be more into the fully rendered art.

CH: You dotted around on a number of series for the next couple of years – *Batman/Deathblow*, *Lex Luthor: Man Of Steel* – but you really grabbed people's attention with »

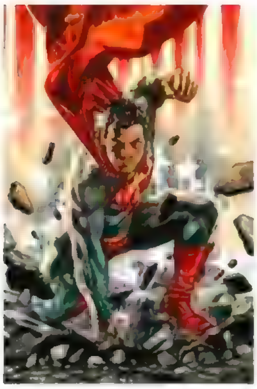

'NOTHER
I BEEN TO SOME PARTIES IN MY DAY

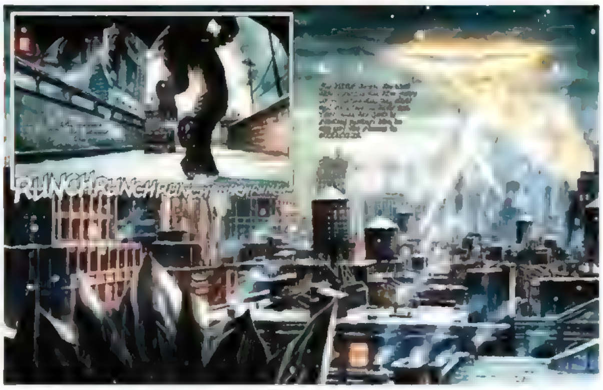
That *Black Dahlia* inspired wide grin...





Bermejo draws; John Constantine weeps.





the 2008 release of *Joker*, a complete fully-painted hardcover release, scripted by Brian Azzarello.

LB: It took two years and a handful of months to complete, with me producing one page every three days from a complete script written by Azzarello. The cover was completed first, in 2006, while we were waiting to get the script approved.

CH: So *The Dark Knight* movie comes out in 2008, with *Joker* pretty much done – and Heath Ledger's take looking remarkable similar to yours, notably with a smile made from scars. Was this pure synchronicity?

LB: Pretty much. Since there were big similarities between what they did in the movie and my portrayal of the Joker, when the book came out – just after the film – everybody simply assumed that I'd somehow taken inspiration from the movie. But I'd been working on the book for years beforehand, and it simply wasn't the case. The movie producers were probably just looking at similar things for inspiration at the time. I remember Jim Lee said that there seem to be moments in pop culture when a lot of people come up with similar ideas all around the same time – just capturing the zeitgeist. And I really feel like that's true.

At that time, I had just read the James Ellroy book *The Black Dahlia*, and that helped to visually inspire my depiction of the Joker. [The Ellroy novel is based, in part, on the real-life gangland murder of Elizabeth Short, where a smile was carved into her face.] The scar-smile wasn't in the script. Brian is a fantastic writer and trusts the artist, so I had complete freedom – and all the visual elements were mine. We were going for a semi-realistic look for the book, so I knew I wasn't going to be drawing, say, the Penguin with a bunch of umbrellas!

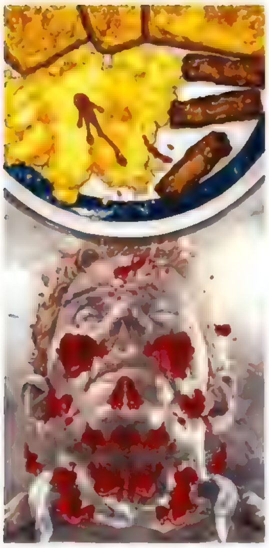
CH: Although, of course, that kind of depiction still has its place...

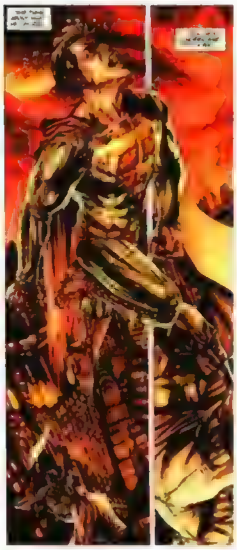
LB: Oh, for sure! Today, I feel more nostalgia for those kind of takes, and that maybe things have shifted too far into making everything so serious – which is really what comic books shouldn't be about. With the Joker I was thinking how I could make Batman's costume look as realistic as possible, but right now I'm going back and enjoying the more playful aspects of those superhero outfits.

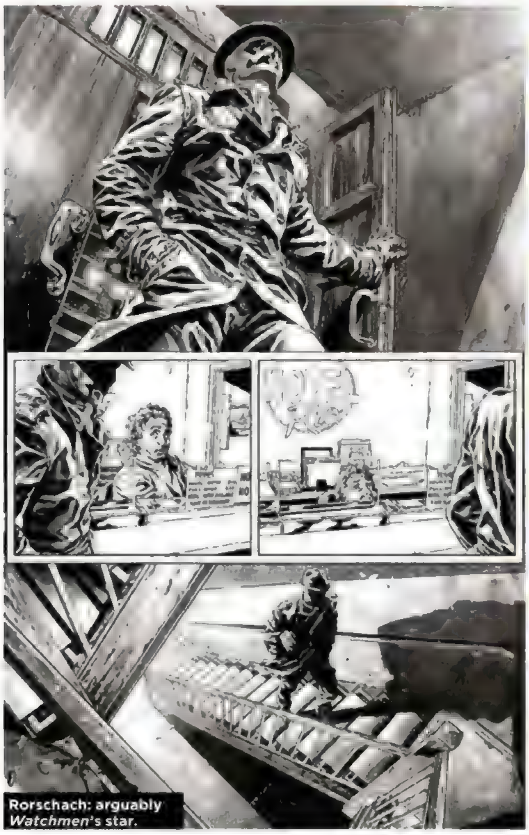
CH: You followed up *Joker* with another painted hardcover, *Batman: Noel*, based on *A Christmas Carol*, in 2011, where the approach seemed slightly more in line with old-school storytelling.

LB: *Noel* was a direct response to the brutally dark *Joker*, and the original idea was to do a children's book. At the time I was talking to a French publisher about adapting works of literature into comics, and I was thinking of maybe *Heart Of Darkness* or *A Christmas Carol* – even if these works are among the most adapted in any format, I still wanted to do my take.

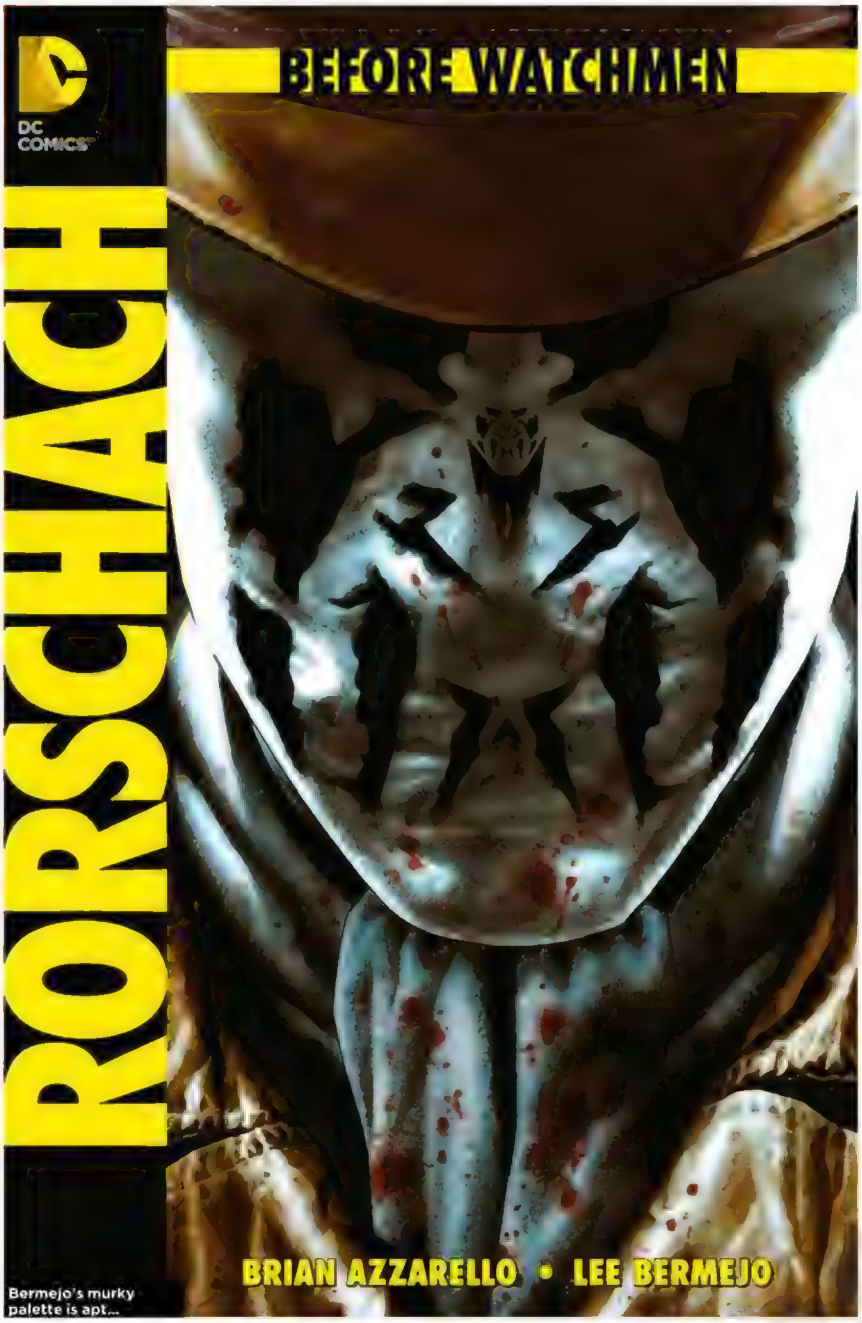
It never went anywhere, but at the same time I was working on a graphic novel idea about this apartment building where the Joker was hiding out. I wanted to do it from the different points of view of all the residents







Rorschach: arguably *Watchmen*'s star.



Bermejo's murky palette is apt...

in the building, after finding out their home was actually a crime den. All these ideas came together to inspire *Noel*, and it took me two and a half years to paint the 96 pages of the book.

CH: More recently, you drew *Rorschach* as part of DC's *Before Watchmen* series. Your style translates well to the uncompromising world of this character, but how did you find working on a monthly book?
LB: Well, by necessity I've had to speed up considerably, as the deadlines on these books have been pretty insane. I drew the entire series of *Rorschach* – all 96 pages of it – in about a year!

CH: Yet the work still shows the same attention to detail...
LB: Well, I didn't sleep for a year! (Laughs) I'm not really happy with the work – it has its moments, but I don't think it's the best example of what I can do. Maybe it's a good example of what I can produce under a lot of pressure, though.

CH: What do you have lined up to do next?
LB: It's a creator-owned project, which is still very much in its early days, and I can't really give any details until contracts are signed. It will probably appear around late 2014 – if it all comes together.

CH: Do you still get inspired by other artists?
LB: Oh, yes – I have my favourites, like Kevin Nowlan and Brian Bolland, but I follow a great many contemporary painters outside of comics too. People like Justin Mortimer, Jenny Saville, Chuck Close – those are currently the artists that inspire me, and who I try to emulate in my own way.

CH: Do you feel comics as a print medium are becoming outdated?
LB: That's the big question right now. Comics, I guess, are still a fetish industry. Personally, I don't want to read a comic on my monitor – I want to hold something in my hand, I want to smell the paper and have the actual object on my shelf, rather than have to turn something on and open a file.

CH: Or something crashes and your entire collection is lost...
LB: Exactly – that's a great point. But the mass market seems to be moving toward digital, as kids today become less used to holding a print version in their hands. Kids never buy CDs these days, for example. I guess, when they get older and they have to move house, at least they'll have less shit to move! (When I move it's a disaster!) Like with all new formats, you gain something and you lose something. For example, listening to something on vinyl has not been surpassed.

Maybe, like with vinyl, things will go one way for most people, but eventually the printed medium will make a fashionable comeback. I'd like to think that, in the future, it would be considered cool to read a paper comic or book on the subway – rather than on iPads or Kindles.

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*With the end of **Before Watchmen: Rorschach**, Bermejo will return to his cover work – a new approach is promised! – and embark on a hinted-at creator-owned project too...*

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

CRIMINALLY CRAFTY COMICS
BLOOF
My Brother's A Chimp

1984/1994: taboo-busting anthology series, or a load of pornographic, misogynistic tripe? **Judge James Lovegrove** presides...

PROSECUTION: Your Honour, it would be fair to say that science fiction is a genre that exists to push boundaries and challenge preconceptions. While it is regarded by many as puerile entertainment for the developmentally arrested, SF – good, quality SF – shows maturity and a willingness to explore the limits of taste and acceptability. This should be as true of SF comics as it is of prose SF. Sadly, the Warren Comics anthology title standing before us in the dock today is the exception that proves the rule. I'm talking about *1984*, which was subsequently renamed *1994* so as not to be confused with the Orwell novel – as if that would ever happen.

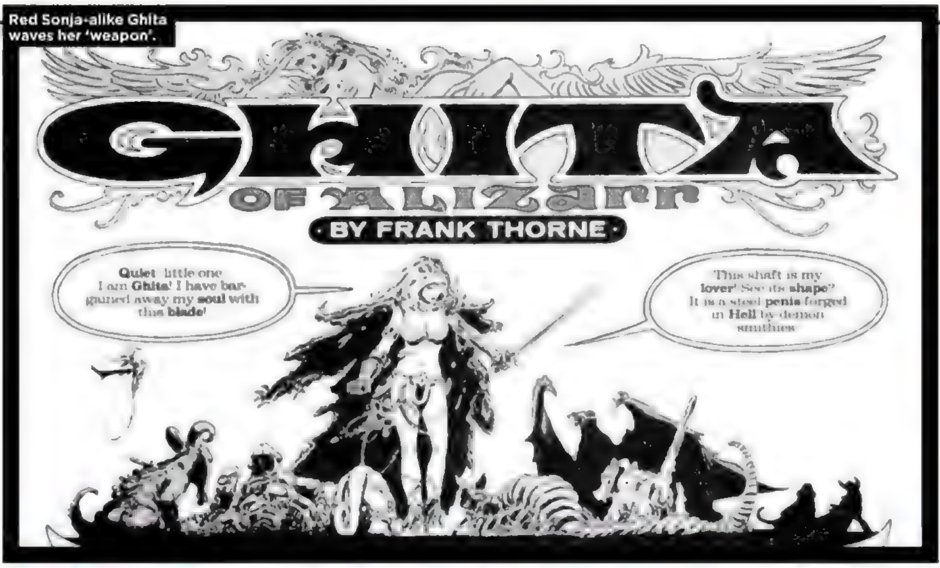
DEFENCE: M'lud, in rebuttal to my learned friend's opening argument, I would simply cite the names of artists who contributed to the magazine during its five-year, 29-issue lifespan. Its pages were graced by illustrative work from such esteemed comics luminaries as Alex Niño, Richard Corben, Frank Thorne, Rudy Nebres, José Ortiz, Wally Wood, Esteban Maroto and Alfredo Alcala. That is more or less a roll call of the top talent of that era, the late '70s and early '80s. HR Giger, famous as the man who designed the creature in *Alien*, contributed cover work, while the writers – notably Bill Dubay, Jan Strnad and Nicola Cuti – were no slouches either. With such a roster of creators, *1984/1994* was a very attractive proposition indeed.

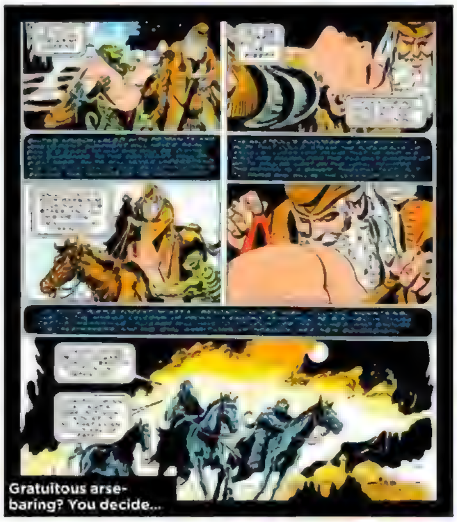
PROSECUTION: What a shame, then, that between them they generated such feeble-minded sexist claptrap. *1984/1994* claims to offer 'Provocative Illustrated Adult Fantasy'. What this translates as is plenty of swearing; quite a bit of nudity, mostly female but none of it explicit; some very near-the-knuckle ethnic stereotyping; the odd bit of violence; and a jaundiced, rather mean-spirited view of humanity.

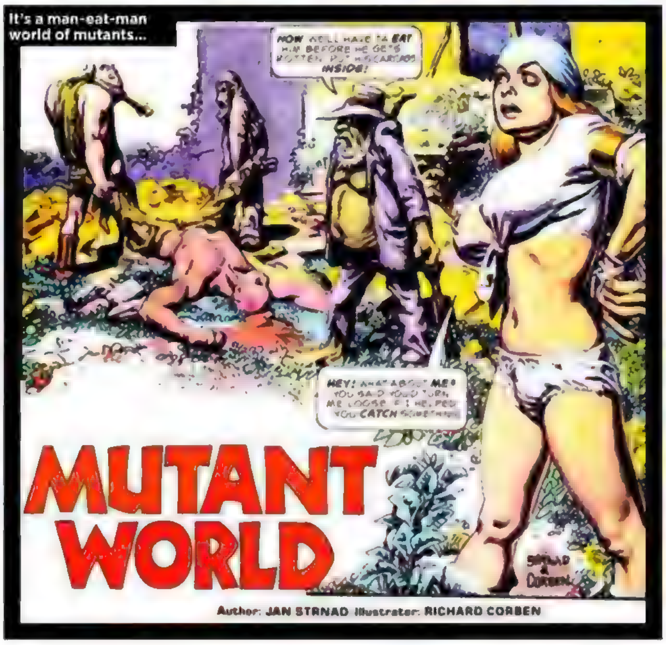
DEFENCE: At the time, there were very few comics catering for an audience who weren't pre-teens or adolescents. Warren was keen to fill that void, and did so amply. Its horror anthologies *Creepy* and *Eerie* were classy and sophisticated and never shied from depicting gore and other nastiness, while *Vampirella* made much of the sexiness of its scantily clad title character. *1984/1994* was simply an extension of that same philosophy into the SF sphere, providing a haven for creators who felt hamstrung by the restrictions of the Comics Code, and wished to prove once and for all that 'comics aren't just for kids'.

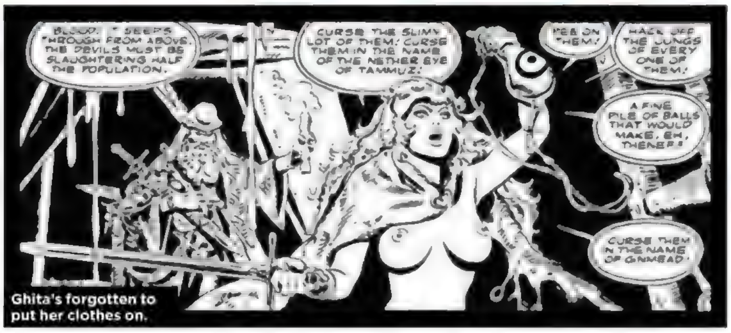
PROSECUTION: Yet all they proved is that comics for adults could be no less juvenile than the standard newsstand fare. The tone of *1984/1994* is of cheap titillation and sniggering immaturity. Take the ongoing series *Idi Amin*, which is set in a post-apocalyptic future and sees the infamous Ugandan dictator's brain transplanted into the body of a nubile white woman. Id, as he/she likes to be known, speaks in clumsy pidgin English: 'Am something wrong with way Id speaks? English am only one of Id's many native tongues, you know!' It is an appalling racist caricature.

DEFENCE: *Idi Amin* is not meant to be taken seriously. It mocks Amin himself in the spirit of true satire, deflating his corruptness, pomposity and egotism. As an artistic response to a man responsible for an estimated half a million deaths, it is entirely valid. The great cartoonist Gerald Scarfe would surely agree. One way of dealing with such horror is grotesque lampooning.


Red Sonja-alike Ghita waves her 'weapon'.
GHITA OF ALIZARR
BY FRANK THORNE
Quiet little one I am Ghita! I have bargained away my soul with this blade!
This shaft is my lover! See its shape? It is a steel penis forged in Hell by demon smithies


Gratuitous arse-baring? You decide...


It's a man-eat-man world of mutants...
MUTANT WORLD
Author: JAN STRNAD Illustrator: RICHARD CORBEN
STRNAD & CORBEN


Ghita's forgotten to put her clothes on.
BLOOD. IT SEEPS THROUGH FROM ABOVE. THE DEVILS MUST BE SLAUGHTERING HALF THE POPULATION.
CURSE THE SLIMY LOT OF THEM! CURSE THEM IN THE NAME OF THE NETHER EYE OF TAMMUZ!
PEE ON THEM!
HACK OFF THE DUNGS OF EVERY ONE OF THEM!
A FINE PILE OF BALLS THAT WOULD MAKE, EH, THERE?
CURSE THEM IN THE NAME OF GNMEAD.

> **“The tone of *1984/1994* is of cheap titillation and sniggering immaturity”**

PROSECUTION: And how about *The Warhawks* in issue #6? Ostensibly it's a parody of DC's *Blackhawks*, but its depiction of a paramilitary unit made up of black men feeds on the image of African-American males as bloodthirsty, priapic and unintelligent. One panel, in which they are shown incompetently trying to fly aeroplanes while their white commanding officer looks on aghast, is captioned: 'Then again, there were those areas wherein they seemed to be flagrantly flaunting their mongoloid mentalities.'

DEFENCE: The racism is the narrator's, not the writer's. Why do we not consider instead this exhibit, issue 9's jaunty sex comedy *The Schmoo*? It's about a protean alien species, the Plas-blobs, who exist only to bring pleasure and gratification to humans. It's beautifully illustrated by Alex Niño in a series of ornate double-page spreads, and its message is one of healthy sexual liberation.

PROSECUTION: A very poor choice of evidence from my learned friend, who has clearly overlooked the dialogue assigned to the tour guide character, Mr Moto. His speech patterns are pure English-mangling Oriental: 'When dlone retchling, noble wife may kindry forrow this meager worm. Flind noble husbland slafe and slound!' It's embarrassing even to quote him.

DEFENCE: One could argue that the humour and racial sensitivities were very much of their time. This was 30 years ago, after all. We live in a more enlightened age. We must not judge yesterday's standards by today's. That said, it cannot be denied that *1984/1994* contained sleek, experimental hard-science fiction stories amid the somewhat coarser material. I refer my learned friend to the bleak irony of issue #11's *Outpost 1017* or the gleefully irreligious *The Missionary* in issue #15. Stories such as these would not have been out of place in any contemporary prose anthology, and they hold up even today. Furthermore, strips such as *Herma* and *Ghita Of Alizarr* feature strong, lusty heroines who are comfortable with their sexuality and exploit their physical allure to get the better of the men around them. I would submit that my learned friend is simply too po-faced to enjoy the bawdy laughs and edgy libertarian leg-cocking that *1984/1994* traded in.

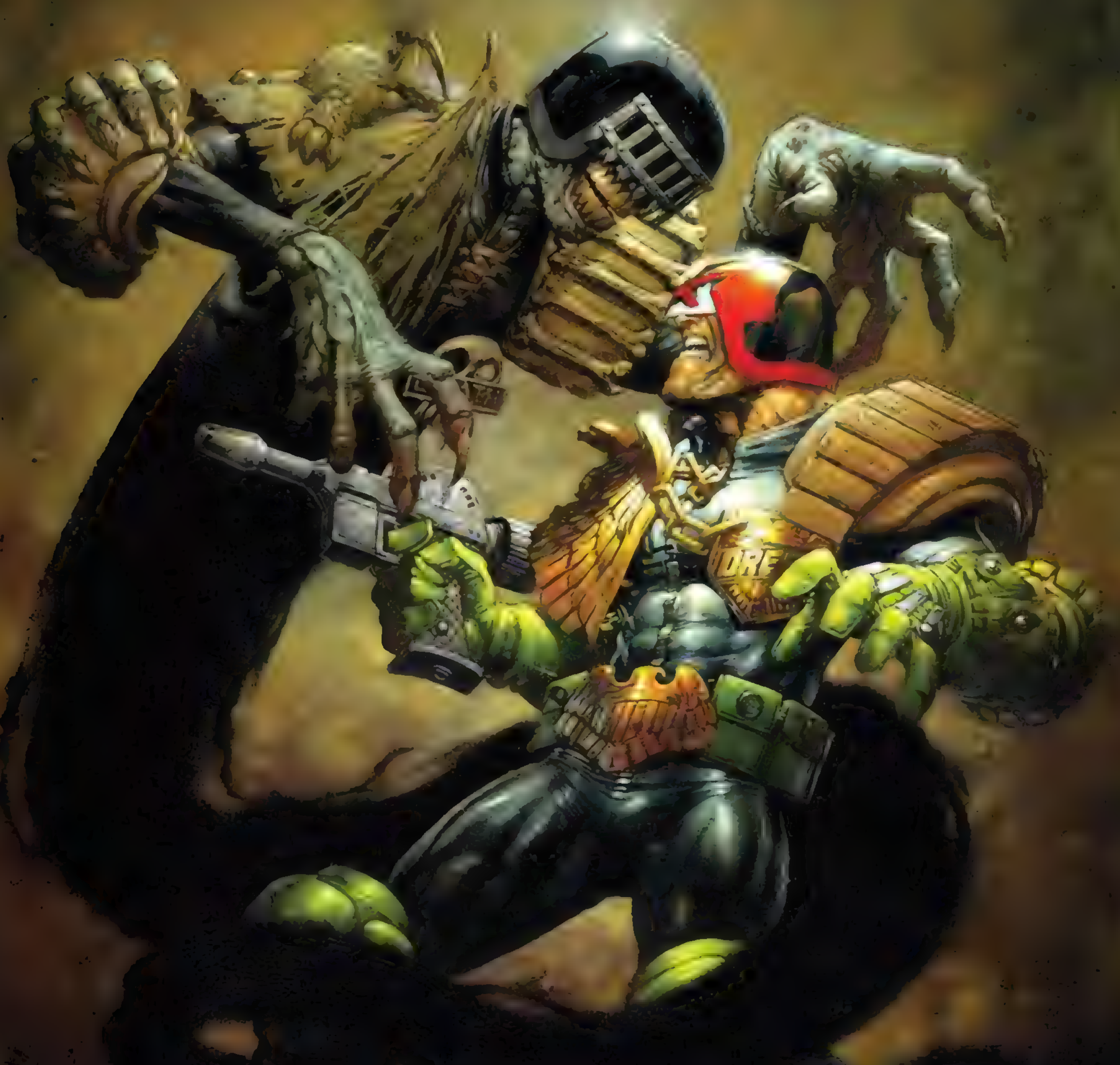
PROSECUTION: Perhaps. Nevertheless, one feels that the magazine was produced by people who should have known better.

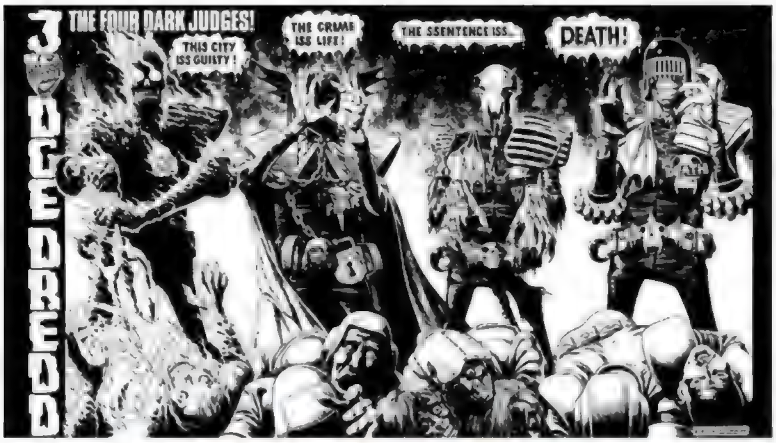
DEFENCE: But they didn't, and that is why, m'lud, you should acquit.

IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
*DC's mid-'80s maxiseries **Thriller**. Experimental? Yes. Comprehensible? Not so much.*

DREDD, AGAIN

Judge Dredd's main man, John Wagner, talks to *Comic Heroes* about big screen adaptations, his favourite *2000 AD* stories and why Uncle Scrooge remains an inspiration... **By Calum Waddell**

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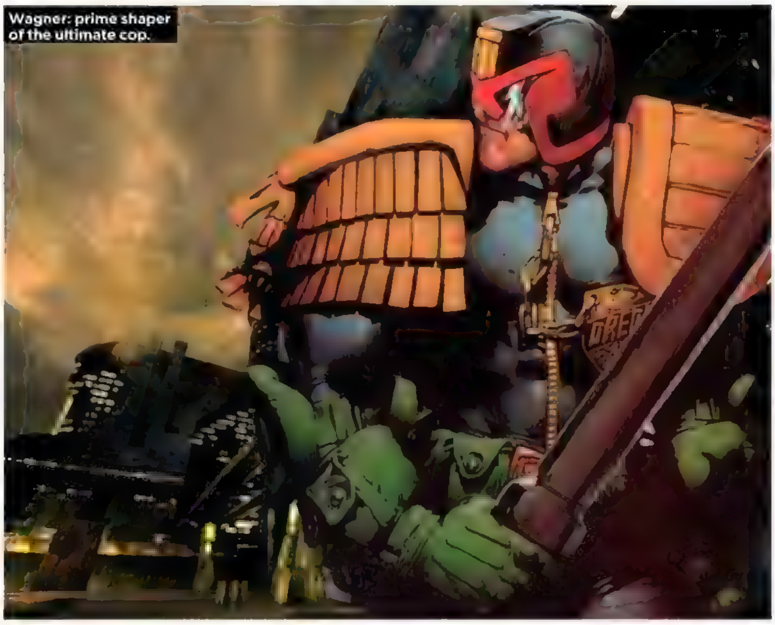
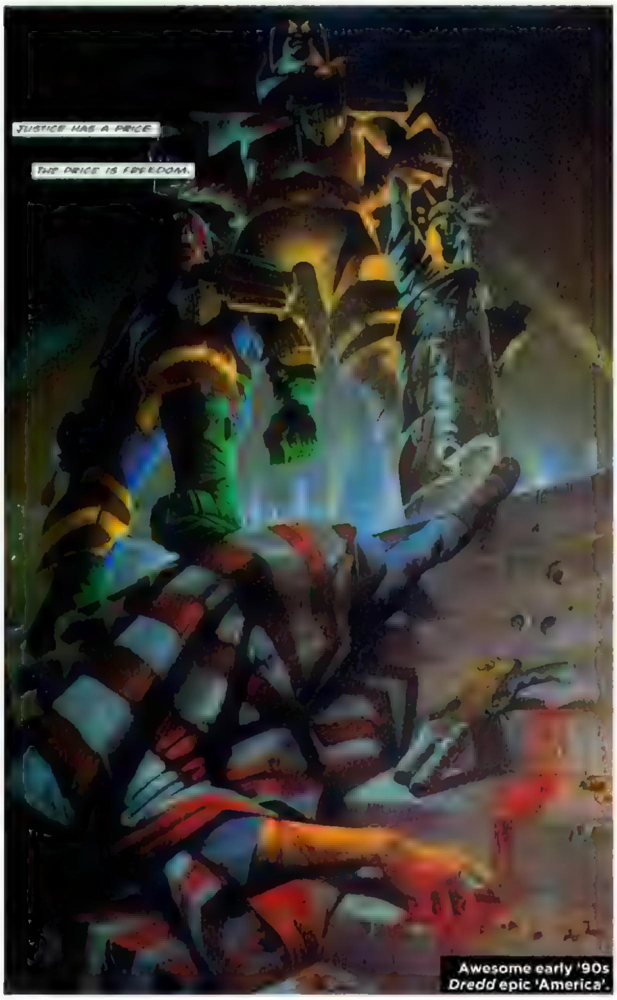
JUDGE DREDD
THE FOUR DARK JUDGES!
THIS CITY ISS GUILTY!
THE CRIME ISS LIFE!
THE SSENTENCE ISS...
DEATH!


Wagner: prime shaper of the ultimate cop.



Awesome early '90s *Dredd* epic 'America'.

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> **“I always thought Dredd had elements of both the hero and the villain in there”**

John Wagner remains an iconic presence in British comics, and one of the most important forces in *2000 AD*'s history. So yes, the writer is of course synonymous with Mega-City One mythology – though others have written the strip, he's been the comic book equivalent of 'showrunner' for almost *Judge Dredd*'s entire 35ish years – but he's contributed plenty of other tales to the comic too, from *Strontium Dog* to *Robo-Hunter*, *Button Man* and beyond.

But then there's his work elsewhere too: on *Battle Picture Weekly* and other classic British comics; at Marvel, DC and Dark Horse in America (his work on licensed characters from *Doctor Who* to *Star Wars* is especially notable); and on smaller, more personal projects like *The Bogie Man* and *A History Of Violence*. Wherever he's showed up, Wagner has demonstrated a consistently intriguing imagination, a willingness to wrestle with big themes, and a control of his craft that's almost second to none: everyone from Warren Ellis to Alan Moore, Garth Ennis to Alan Grant has cited him as a huge influence.

Wagner's scripts are famously terse, no-nonsense and direct – and, thankfully, so are his reflections on his career, from the various movie adaptations of his work to the characters he'd really like to work on. Some of his answers you could probably guess at, but others will surprise you. In other words: the law starts now...

Comic Heroes: Let's begin with *Dredd*, the recent, gritty 3D movie take on Old Stony Face. How pleased were you with it?

John Wagner: Oh, I was extremely happy with it. I was a little worried when I saw the first cut, but, thankfully, they went back and added more; they did things like changing the music and putting in more and better special effects. That all really helped – and when you compare it to the first one they made [the 1995 big budget Sylvester Stallone movie] there's a huge difference in quality. I mean, that first *Judge Dredd* film had *nothing* to do with the character I'd created. It was such a disappointment. But with this one I think they got it right – and the good news is that it's done well on DVD, so we're all happy.

CH: I saw *Dredd* with a friend who knew nothing about the character, and after we left the cinema he asked me if we'd just been watching a fascist movie...

JW: [Laughs] Yeah – it had elements of that in there. But, for many *Dredd* fans, it was still not enough.

CH: Right, because he has, at times, been a particularly unpleasant fellow...

JW: Yeah, he has that to him. But the trouble we had at the beginning, when we were first introducing him in the comics, was that a lot of the readers didn't realise that. So we wrote some stories in those early *2000 AD* issues that really stressed how horrible him and his system actually were. We were trying to tackle those readers who thought he was a genuine hero. Personally, I always thought he had elements of both the hero and the villain in there, and that's probably why he still grabs readers so much.

CH: It seems now like quite a '70s thing: the political atmosphere – in both the UK and elsewhere – at the time seeming somehow right for such an authoritarian figure...

JW: I think even back then you could see the way everything seemed to be going. There was an obvious right wing element in society at the time – even before Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister – and other governments around the world were becoming more authoritarian as well. When you think about it, you could say that Dredd is no worse, and maybe even a little better, than a lot of the police forces we actually have now.

Let's not forget that a lot of extremely draconian practices are protected by police forces in other countries – such as suppressing people and their right to demonstrate and to

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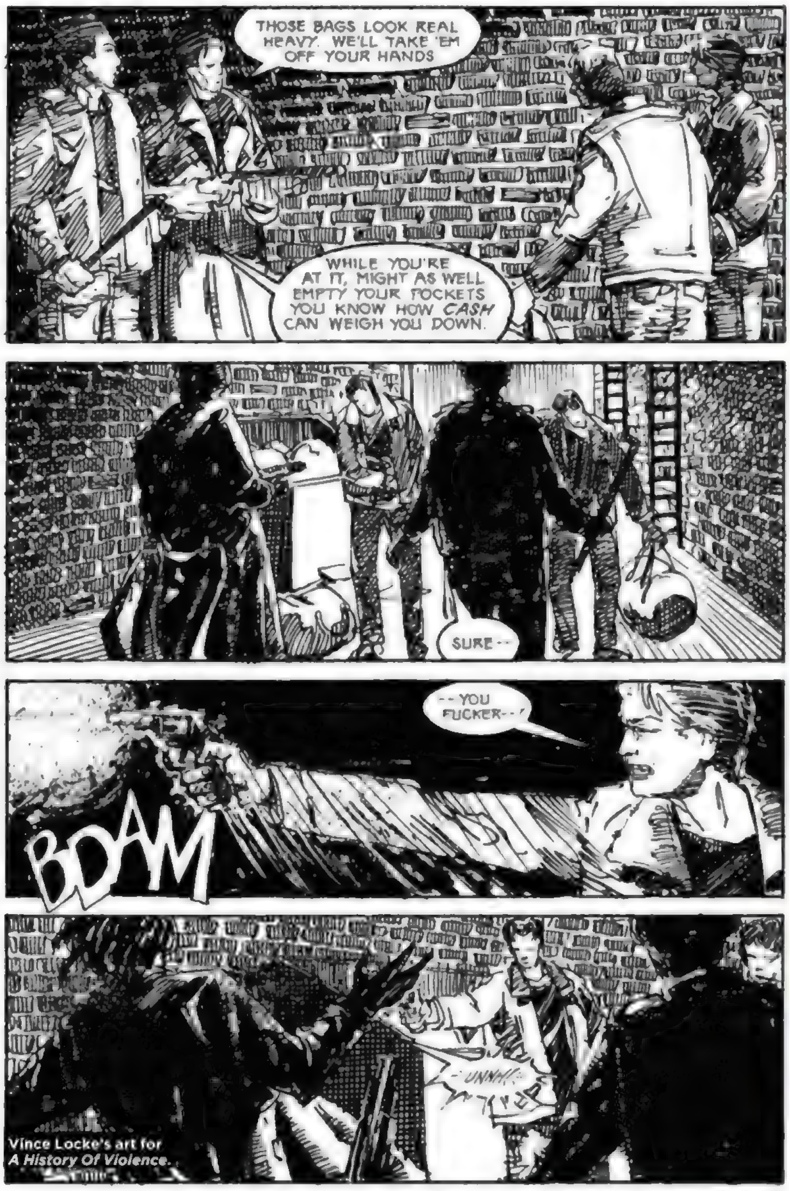

THOSE BAGS LOOK REAL HEAVY. WE'LL TAKE 'EM OFF YOUR HANDS
WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, MIGHT AS WELL EMPTY YOUR POCKETS. YOU KNOW HOW *CASH* CAN WEIGH YOU DOWN.
SURE--
--YOU FUCKER--!
BDAM
UNNH!

Vince Locke's art for *A History Of Violence*.

Viggo Mortensen in Cronenberg's film.

A *Button Man* movie is also on the cards.

> **“Dredd is no worse, and maybe even a little better, than a lot of the police forces we have now”**

free speech. You only have to switch on the news to see that taking place somewhere on the planet.

CH: What was it like working with Carlos Ezquerra on the creation of Judge Dredd?
JW: Carlos is, without a shadow of a doubt, the best character creator that I have ever worked with. However, initially I did not like his interpretation of Dredd – and, to tell you the truth, I'm still not all that wild about it. My idea for Dredd was a leaner and more clean-cut figure than his was. In fact, I sent him a still from the movie *Death Race 2000* – the original one with David Carradine – and I said, ‘Can he look a bit like that?’ But Carlos wasn't going to go with that idea – he wanted to embellish him a little bit more...

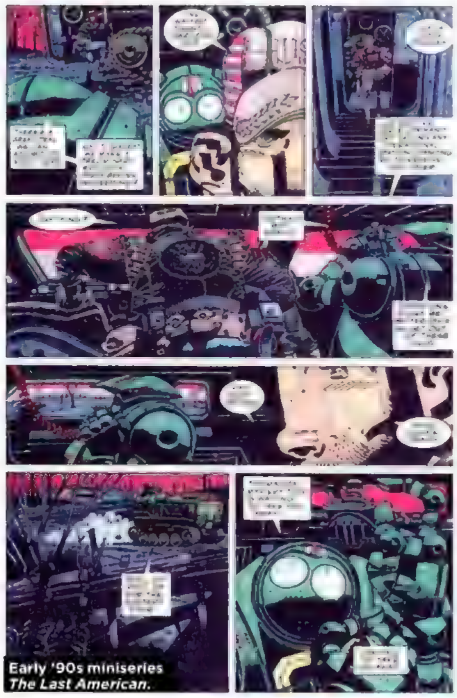
CH: What makes the Carlos version of Dredd so interesting is that, despite all the gold and odd details on the outfit, his art always toughens it up by looking quite rough – and maybe even a little unfinished...
JW: Well, he draws in quite an unusual way – and a lot of people don't take to it. For instance, it took a while for the Americans to get used to his style. He often uses a dash-line to outline his characters, whereas the Americans tend to like their comic book art to be smooth. But, like I said, Carlos does it his way or not at all [laughs].

CH: My favourite *Judge Dredd* story is probably ‘Song Of The Surfer’; there's something about seeing the little guy triumph, at least in part, over the monolithic Judge system that seems so right. What makes Chopper such an appealing rebel?
JW: Well, Chopper was originally presented as a graffiti artist in Mega-City One. He'd been drawn by Ron Smith, and Alan Grant and I decided to revive him. I think that morning we had been talking about the Silver Surfer, and what it might be like to have him go up against Dredd in Mega-City One, and Chopper was the character we decided to use for this.

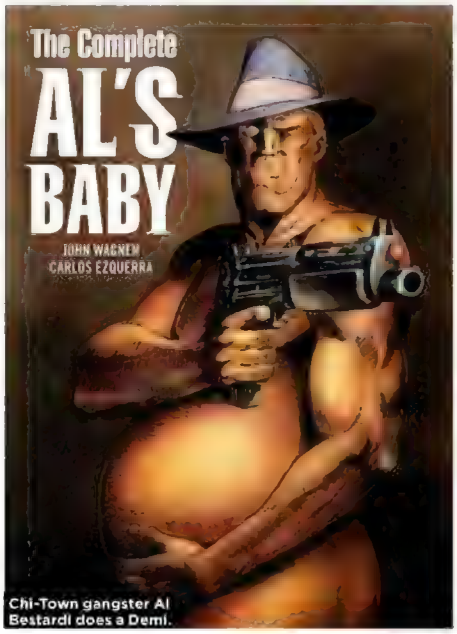
A lot of the success of that story came from Cam Kennedy, whose art gave you a wonderful sense of movement. And that was it, really – we just wanted someone who would stand up against the Judges and have a fighting chance. We wanted a hero – a *real* hero – even if he never managed to win at the end of the day.

CH: ‘Song Of The Surfer’ would make a great Dredd movie, of course...
JW: Yeah, I agree – it would be wonderful. I'd love to see that happen, and if there's ever a sequel to *Dredd* – which we don't know about at the moment – I know that is definitely one of the plotlines in Alex Garland's mind.

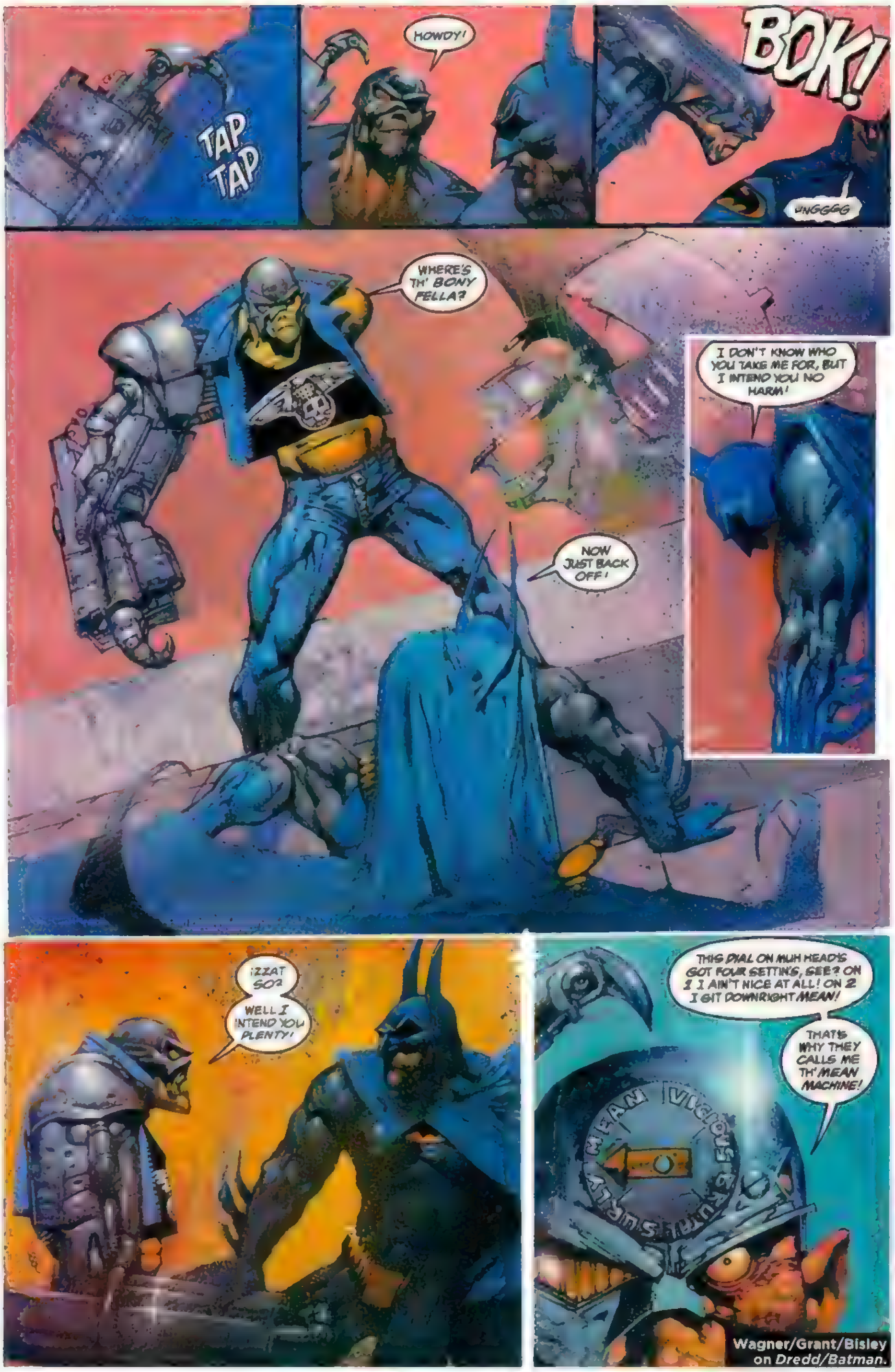
CH: How do you feel about the similarities between the world seen in the film *Blade Runner* and Mega-City One?
JW: A lot of people have mentioned that to me over the years. I've seen *Blade Runner* – but, to be honest, I can't remember a lot about it. I saw it once, when it came out, and that was it. So, surprisingly, I don't really have much of an answer to that question!



Early '90s miniseries *The Last American.*


The Complete
AL'S BABY
JOHN WAGNER
CARLOS EZQUERRA

Chi-Town gangster Al Bestardi does a Demi.


TAP TAP
HOWDY!
BOK!
UNGGGG
WHERE'S TH' BONY FELLA?
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU TAKE ME FOR, BUT I INTEND YOU NO HARM!
NOW JUST BACK OFF!
IZZAT SO?
WELL I INTEND YOU PLENTY!
THIS DIAL ON MUH HEAD'S GOT FOUR SETTIN'S, SEE? ON 1 I AIN'T NICE AT ALL! ON 2 I GIT DOWNRIGHT MEAN!
THAT'S WHY THEY CALLS ME TH' MEAN MACHINE!
MEAN VICIOUS FURIOUS SURLY

Wagner/Grant/Bisley on *Dredd/Batman.*

CH: Another very memorable Dredd storyline was 'The Dead Man', full of misdirection; our hero seeming to retire and disappear from the strip. How did that all come about?

JW: I wanted to do something different with Dredd; I wanted to get him out of the city, for a start, and I also wanted to do something where there would be a big mystery at the centre of it.

I saw John Ridgway's art in a *2000 AD* story called '*Summer Magic*', and that was exactly what I wanted for '*The Dead Man*'. So I wrote it with his artwork in mind. I also wrote it in a different kind of style, because it was important to me that no one recognised it was Dredd. I wanted to tie it into the series with this surprise ending – and I think it worked. No one – at least to my knowledge – guessed it was Judge Dredd.

CH: Actually, in the final instalment, where it was revealed that this mysterious, burned-up wanderer had actually been Judge Dredd all along, one reader had a letter published where he confirmed he had figured it out. This was *2000 AD Prog* #668...

JW: Well, I think he was caught and put down [laughs].

CH: Of course, 'The Dead Man' storyline led to 'Necropolis', which reintroduced readers to Judge Death. What was the appeal in having such an otherworldly arch-villain for Dredd in the first place?

JW: It was Alan Grant who came up with Death. He was working on editorial at the time, and he suggested that there should be a villain who was the total antithesis of Dredd. At the time we were lacking really good villains for him – the bad guys in *Dredd* always got killed quite quickly [laughs]. So Alan Grant suggested doing something supernatural, and the idea came from there.

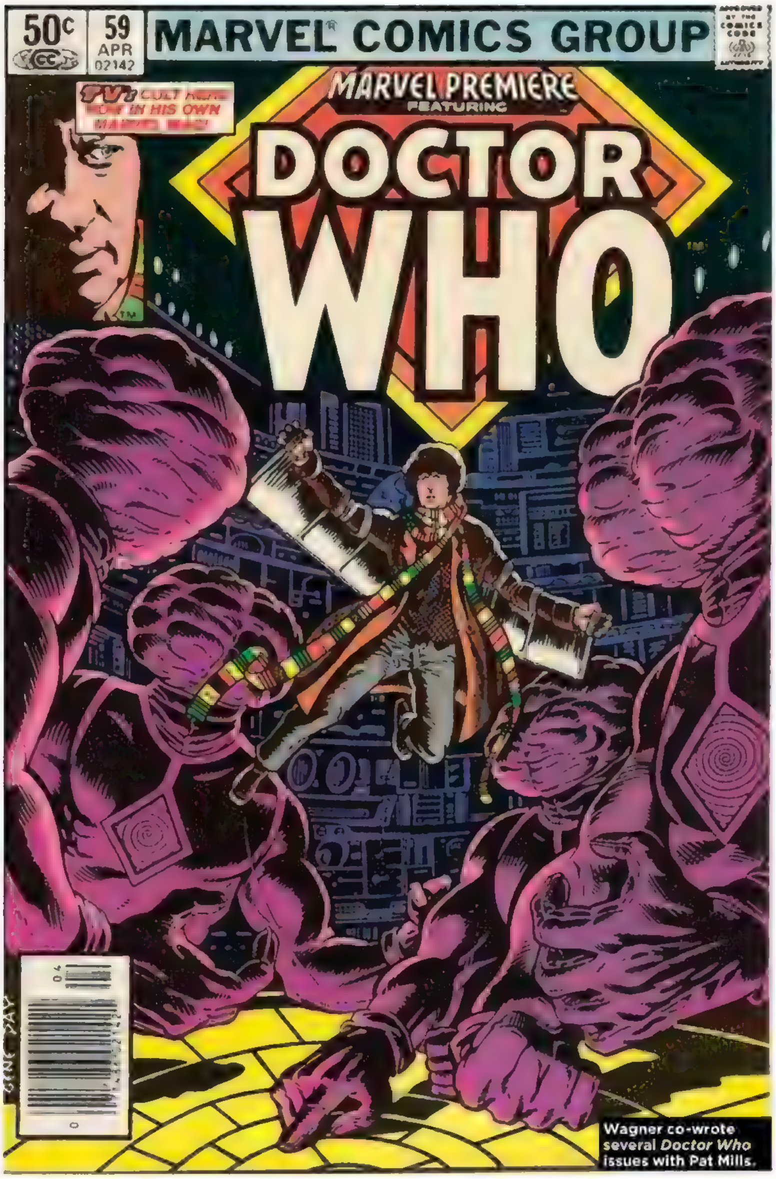
The beauty of Judge Death and his cronies is that you can never kill them – they will always come back. But what brought him to life was Brian Bolland's wonderful artwork. He's still one of my favourite *Dredd* artists.

CH: Moving away from Judge Dredd, what are your memories of creating *The Bogie Man*?

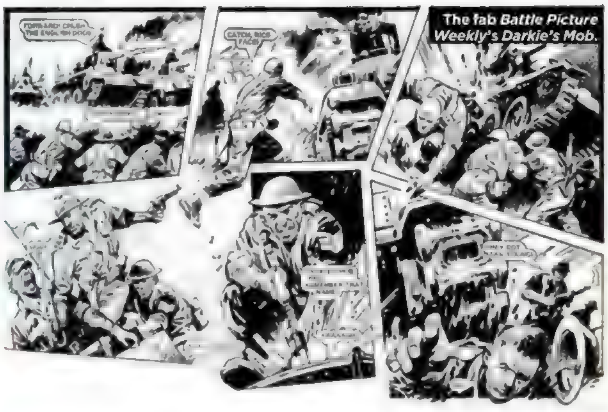
JW: I loved doing it. These were difficult days, though, because we had to find a publisher...

CH: Right, it was initially released by Fat Man Press, a small, one-shot, Scottish independent label...

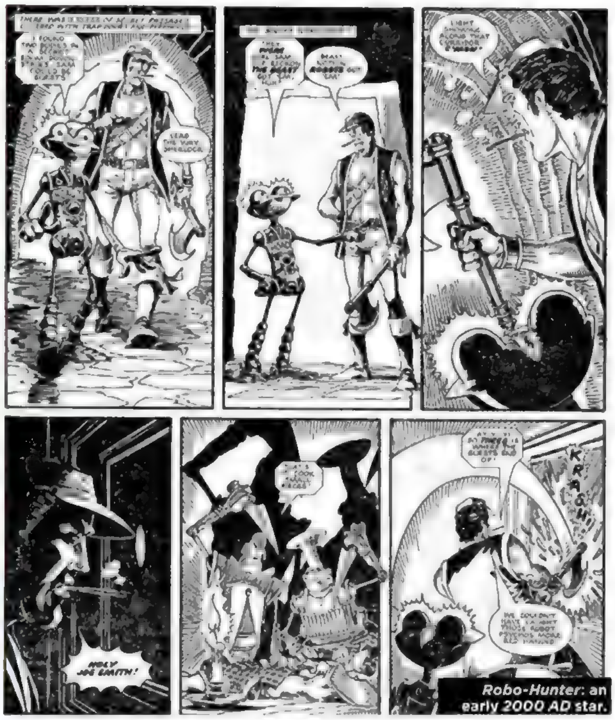
JW: Fat Man Press was created by John McShane and George Jackson, both Glasgow lads and really enthusiastic. Unfortunately, they had a lot of trouble getting that whole thing organised. It was not easy for them, but we got there in the end. It was very important to me that the readers got to experience Bogie – I loved doing a story which was set in Scotland, and he's such a fun character. »



Wagner co-wrote several *Doctor Who* issues with Pat Mills.



The fab *Battle Picture Weekly*'s *Darkie's Mob*.


HOLY JOE SMITH!
KRAGH!

Robo-Hunter: an early *2000 AD* star.

“ The BBC lost everything that made *The Bogie Man* good in that adaptation ”

CH: How did you feel about the little-seen 1992 BBC adaptation of the strip, starring Robbie Coltrane?
JW: That remains my only disappointment of the whole *Bogie Man* project. They lost everything that made the character good in that adaptation. I don't know why they had to mess around with the plot.

I heard, although I don't know this as a fact, that as they were about to start filming it the director said to the writer, "This isn't funny any more. Can you do something about it?" Well, it turned out he had taken a lot of our jokes out of the stories – so he went back and put them all back in, but in the wrong places. The whole thing didn't make any sense to me, so that story wouldn't actually surprise me. I videotaped it when it came out, but I accidentally wiped it and I really couldn't care less. It was abominable, and I have no interest in watching it again.

CH: What was your experience of tackling Batman, particularly on the *Judge Dredd* crossovers like *Judgement On Gotham*? It must have been quite a challenge to bring the two characters together...
JW: It seemed to work really well, didn't it? Simon Bisley's artwork on it was terrific, which certainly helped. My ethos on these things is that the first idea you come up with is never the right one – you have to keep thinking, and coming up with a better way of telling the story. But with *Judgement On Gotham* we ended up using the very first idea that Alan Grant and I came up with. However, just to stay true to my theory we spent two months trying to come up with something better before eventually coming back to it [laughs].

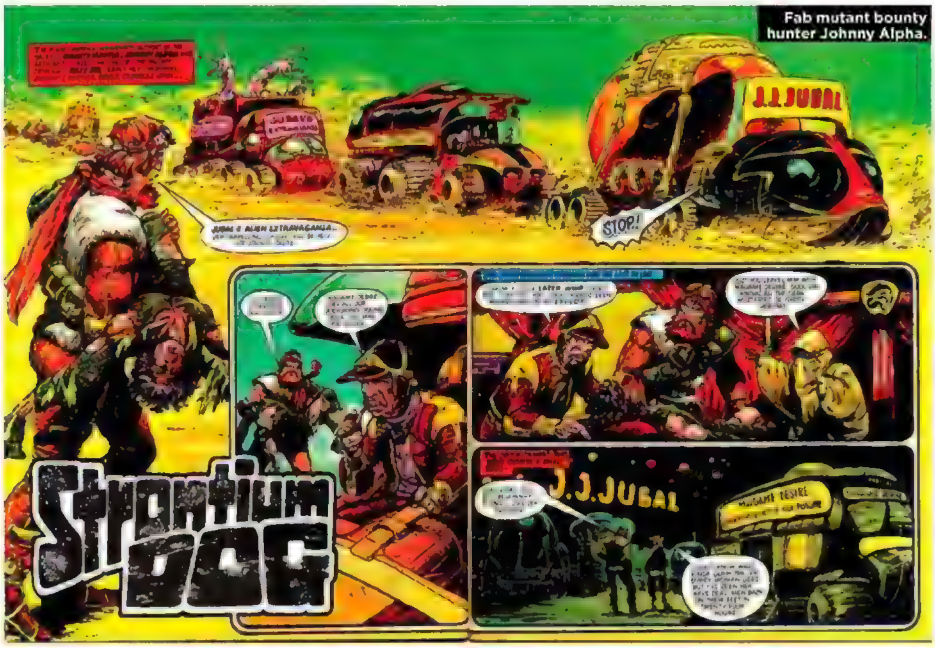
I think the story worked because Batman is *not* a superhero. I don't think we could do a crossover with Superman or the Fantastic Four in the same way. Batman is Bruce Wayne – he is a nuts and bolts character, even if he's also, shall we say, a bit exotic.

CH: Were you happy when you found out that David Cronenberg would be handling the big screen adaptation of your Paradox Press/Vertigo graphic novel, *A History Of Violence*?
JW: I was delighted when Cronenberg was announced as the director. When I knew someone that talented, and that accomplished, was going to be turning it into a movie I was full of confidence. So it wasn't a surprise to me when it came out as good as it did, and got all of the acclaim that it did.

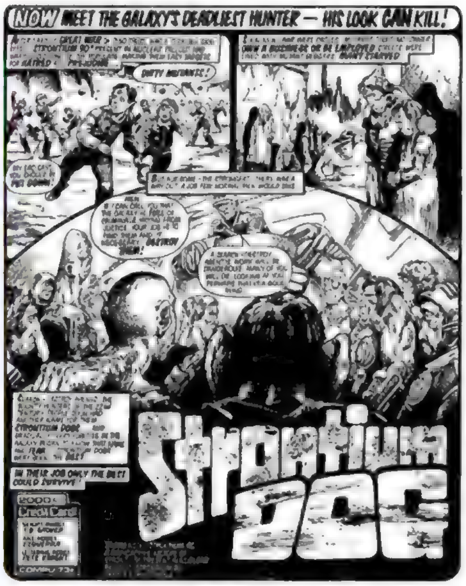
I was there for every stage of the filming, and with the cast they had I knew we had a shot at a decent movie. It was important to me that they got *A History Of Violence* right – especially after my experience with the first *Judge Dredd* movie...

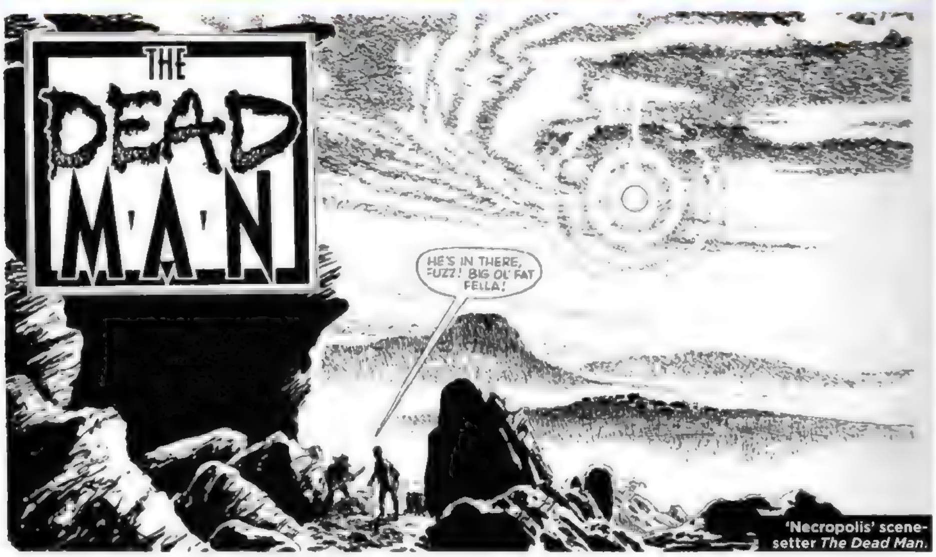
CH: Is that still a big thorn in your side?
JW: Yeah, I hated it. I hated almost everything about it.

CH: It had some good special effects...
JW: I thought the CGI was quite good, and some of the production values were impressive, but that was it.

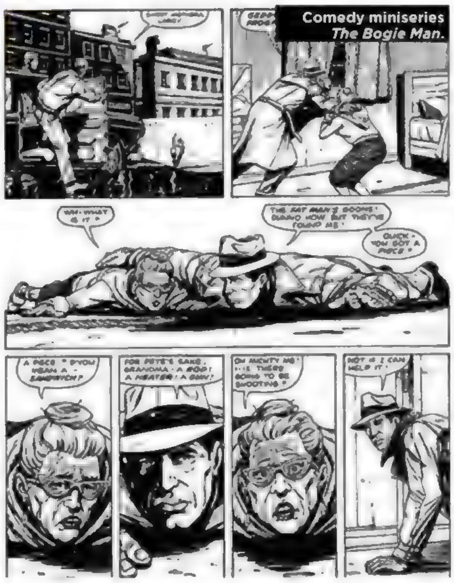


Fab mutant bounty hunter Johnny Alpha.


NOW MEET THE GALAXY'S DEADLIEST HUNTER — HIS LOOK CAN KILL!
Strontium Dog


THE DEAD MAN
HE'S IN THERE, FUZZ! BIG OL' FAT FELLA!

'Necropolis' scene-setter *The Dead Man.*



Comedy miniseries *The Bogie Man.*

CH: Stallone was a terrible casting choice...
JW: I'm never going to complain about Stallone. If he hadn't done it then the film wouldn't have been made – and I'd never have been able to buy my house! But everything else in there was wrong. The plot was certainly all wrong: it had nothing to do with *Judge Dredd*. They paid no respect to who Dredd really was. And they chucked away the Judge Hershey character as well.

CH: Certainly, the semi-romantic angle didn't really suit Dredd at all, did it?
JW: Do you mean when she kissed Dredd at the end? I remember sitting there speechless at that. It was just disgraceful.

CH: Speaking of film adaptations, what's the state of play with *Button Man*? It's long been talked about as a big screen property...
JW: Well, it's currently under option at Dreamworks. The Danish director, Nicolas Winding Refn – he's the guy who made *Drive* – got hold of it. I think it's in safe hands, because I've been told he is going to stay as true to the original as he possibly can.

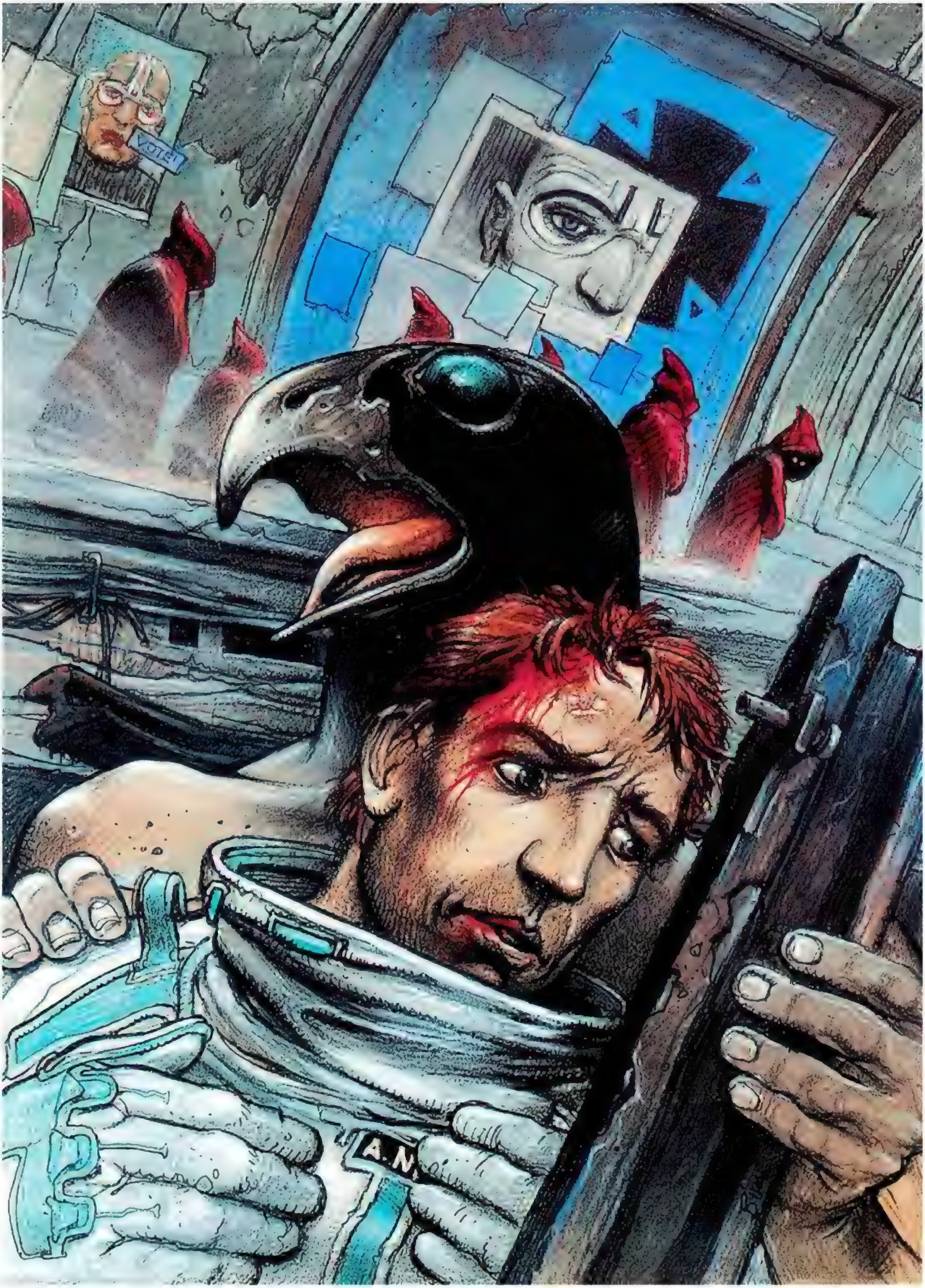
Certainly, I saw some of the early scripts for *Button Man*, and they were veering into Hollywood cliché land. For me, *Button Man* is something that, if you try and change it too much, you lose what it is. That's what happened with the first Dredd movie, and what didn't happen with the new Dredd movie, so let's hope they can keep the same approach up with *Button Man*.

CH: Do you have any sympathy for people trying to adapt a comic book for the cinema? After all, they know they've got to try to please both the fans and the general public...
JW: I think that the challenge is to make sure you stay true to the original, and keep what is good about it. I have an example of my own. When Kitchen Sink revived Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, they asked me to write one of the stories – and mine was the only one that closely resembled Eisner's take on the character. Everyone else just did their own thing – and I think that when you do that it disrespects the original creator's vision. So you need to try and not impose yourself too much...

> **“ I'm never going to complain about Stallone... but everything else in there was wrong ”**

CH: Finally, if you could tackle any comic book character, ideally one you have never worked on before, who would it be?
JW: I'd like to write Uncle Scrooge – you know, the Disney character. The old *Uncle Scrooge* comics from the '50s and '60s were just brilliant – and there's also his Scottish connection. When I grew up in America that was one of the few comics I could get my hands on, and because I knew I was from Scottish stock he really appealed to me. Plus, they kind of have it right – we're all a wee bit mean [laughs]. CH

*John Wagner continues to guide **Judge Dredd** and **Strontium Dog** in **2000 AD**; the epic 'Day Of Chaos' is now being collected.*


VOTE!
A.N.

HAUNTED BY THE FUTURE

Fleeing Communist Yugoslavia as a child left its mark on the great comic book creator (and film director) Enki Bilal. By Paul Gravett

A vigorous and smouldering 62 years of age, Enki Bilal has been instrumental in expanding the potential and prestige of 'bande dessinée' (or the comics medium) in his adopted homeland of France over the past 40 years. It's not every comics artist who is given carte blanche by the Louvre Palace in Paris to paint 22 ghostly portraits of fictional figures from history, each one connected to a work of art in the museum. Like his 'Phantoms of the Louvre', Bilal is a haunted man, pursued by both the past and the future. To understand him and his unique, brooding oeuvre means understanding the history he's lived through – and lives with still.

Born in 1951 in Belgrade, he grew up under Josip Tito's brand of Communism in the former Yugoslavia. Its ethnic and religious divides were patched up after the unifying struggle against the Nazis during World War 2, only to eventually unravel and splinter the country apart. Enki, nickname for 'little Enes', embodied those fragile faultlines as the son of a Czech Catholic mother and a Bosnian, non-practising Muslim father. He has described his childhood as "happy but strange", because of his father's departure, leaving his mother and sister when Bilal was only five. His father had fought in the resistance and was Tito's personal tailor, yet he refused to join the Communist Party. In 1956, he departed Belgrade for Paris for a year to pursue his couture career. Father and son would not see each other again for five years.

GANGS OF BELGRADE

The Cold War bred suspicion. A Communist state was not an easy place for a mother raising two children, whose father had left for the bourgeois West. As a boy, Bilal found ways to have fun, playing football, going with his mother and sister every Sunday to the movies - especially his favourites, Westerns. Equally inspired by reading *Donald Duck* comics, he would come home and draw his own versions of the films. He also drew in coloured chalks on the pavement, a talent spotted by a director casting a film about two rival gangs of kids. Enki was off school for a month making his screen debut, aged nine.

Stardom was shortlived. Back in class, Bilal was told off for not paying attention and retorted, "Well, anyway, we're going to leave." The family's secret was out. Luckily, instead of informing on them, his teacher revealed that her husband could arrange their exit papers. Her motive was simple: she wanted their apartment. So their departure in 1961 happened swiftly – too swiftly. After 42 hours on the train, on their arrival in Paris on a rainy night, Bilal's father was hardly ready for them. Secretly, his married mistress wanted to end their double life. After five years, it was not a joyful family reunion.

To escape these tensions, Bilal sought refuge in sport, in his second language, and in drawing – especially comics. He was 15 when he took his pages to show René Goscinny, editor of *Pilote* magazine – *Asterix*, *Lieutenant Blueberry* and more – who was encouraging but urged him to finish his schooling. Five years later, in 1971, after brief studies in literature and art and several dead-end jobs, he said to himself, "I'll never be able to lead lives like these. I must succeed at what I like, comics." He submitted a two-page colour story to *Pilote*'s talent contest and won. At the prize ceremony, he was welcomed by his heroes from the magazine. ("I was really surprised by this camaraderie between comics creators," he said.) A short comic published in *Pilote* in 1972 would be the first of many.

His most important collaborator at *Pilote* would be renowned *Valerian* writer Pierre Christin, whom he was introduced

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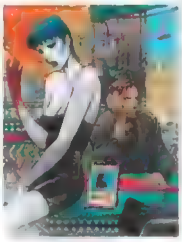
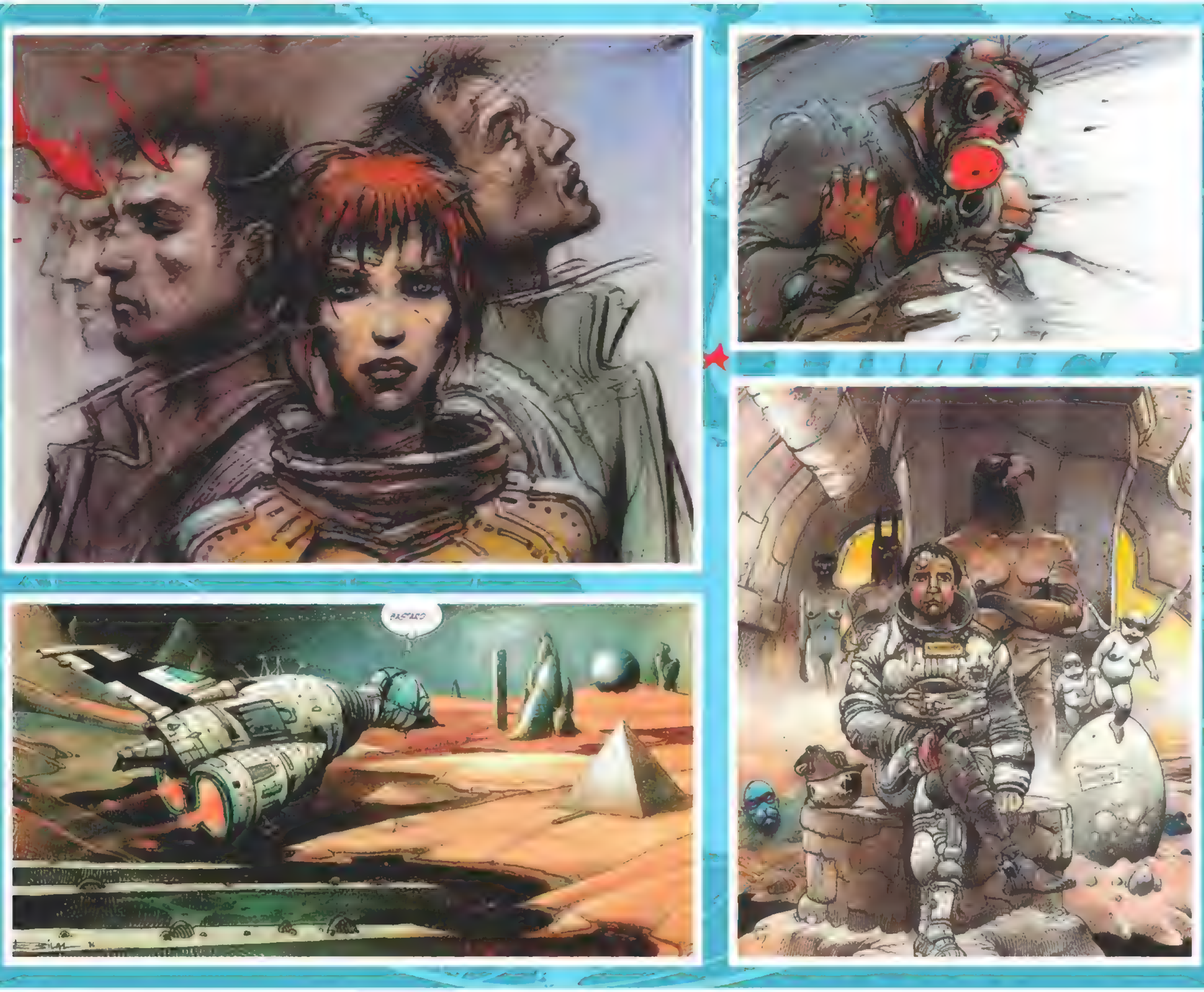


Opposite page: In his Nikopol Trilogy, Bilal reveals a decadent dystopia, overwhelming and baroque, inspired by directors like Andrei Tarkovsky of *Solaris* and *Stalker* fame.



Above: Bilal's fantastical work features otherworldly creatures populating or exploring strange and distant lands.

to by the series' artist, Mézières. Christin offered him *The Cruise Of Lost Souls*, the first in a trilogy of sociological fables about ecological and employment protests and regional issues of the day, completed by *Ship Of Stone* (1976) and *The Town That Didn't Exist* (1977).

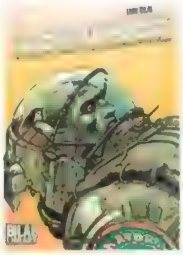
Christin's tales, set in different regional towns in France, demanded realistic artwork, even field trips for research. For a fantasist like Bilal, "Drawing with devilish precision houses in Britanny or Citroën cars was hell!" Luckily, Bilal was able to convince Christin to incorporate some fantastical elements, adding Lovecraftian forces to the political turmoil at stake in these 'Legends of Today'.

WAR STORIES

Bilal and Christin's next collaborations were even more politically charged, addressing, if not anticipating, world events as they were happening. In *The Black Order Brigade* (1979) a band of Fascist terrorists, now in their eighties, massacre a small village in Spain, reigniting the country's civil war after 50 years. Closer still to Bilal's East European background was *The Hunting Party*, developed in tandem with Christin as they serialised it in *Pilote* from 1981 to 1983. Its catalyst is Vassily Chevchenko, a fictional veteran of the October Revolution, who is paralysed, unable to speak, but determined to hold onto power. He invites high-ranking loyalists from several Communist countries to a hunting weekend as an elaborate cover to eliminate a possible successor. The ailing leader becomes a symbol and portent of the Soviet Union's disintegration to come.

Before *The Hunting Party*, in 1980, Bilal wrote his first full-length graphic novel *Gods In Chaos*, evolving it intuitively as he switched between his writing desk and drawing board. He also abandoned his technique of first completing meticulous linework in black ink before applying colours, in favour of lightly pencilling and then painting in 'direct colour', in acrylic, pastel and crayon.

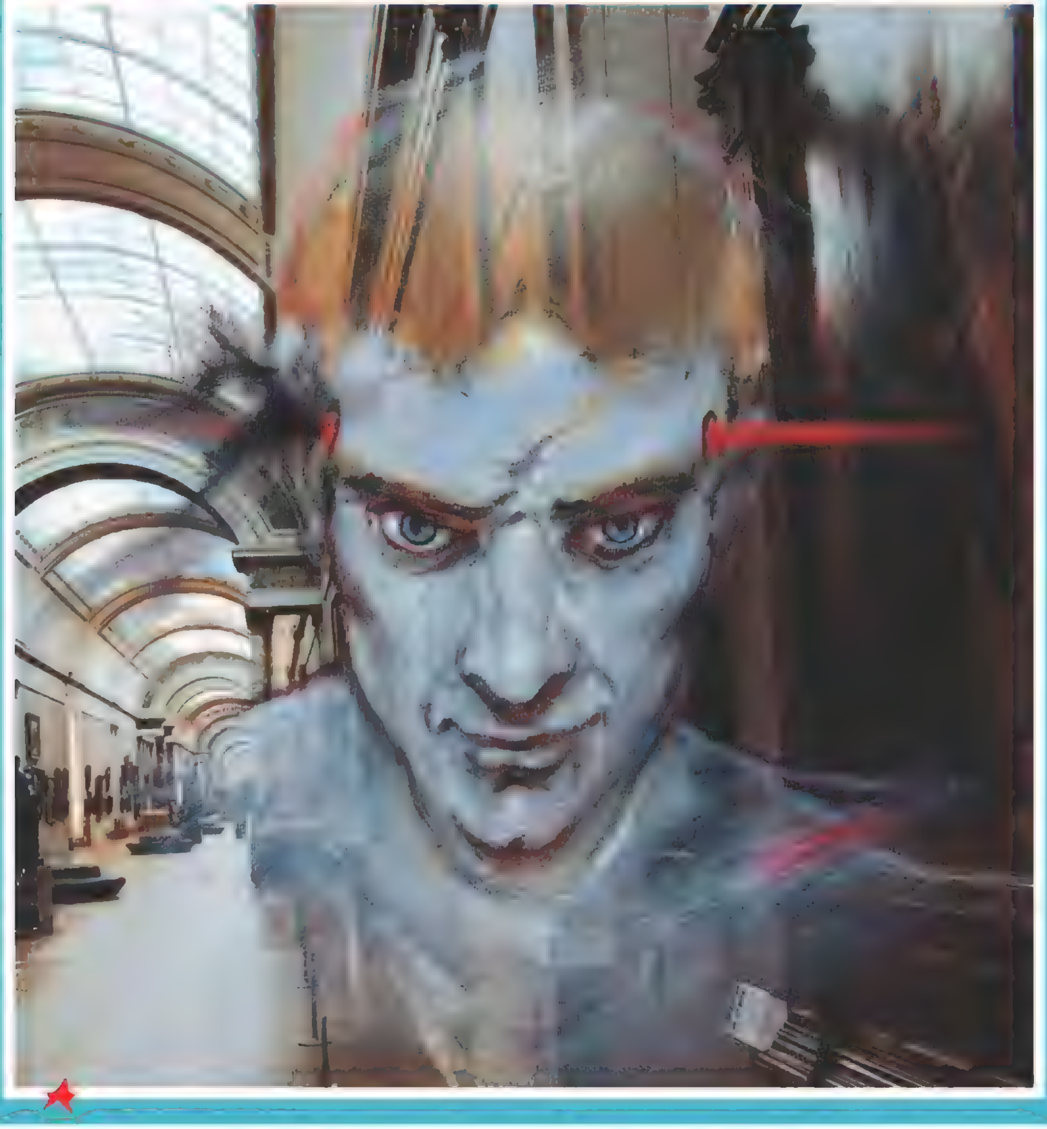
The linking thread through what became a trilogy of albums is Alcide Nikopol (named after a Ukrainian city), a man who fell to earth, after orbiting in suspended animation, imprisoned in space for desertion. His miserable mortal life alters radically, when he is revived, injured but unchanged, 20 years later in the Paris of 2023, where everyone else has aged. His missing leg is replaced with a metal graft welded by Horus, a naked, falcon-headed alien renegade, who looks like his namesake, the Egyptian god. Horus, using Nikopol's possessed body, infiltrates the chambers of the painted Parisian governor Choublanc (French for loser) and seizes power. In a time-warping twist, Nikopol then discovers that his wife, long dead, had a son, who is now the same age as him and virtually his twin.

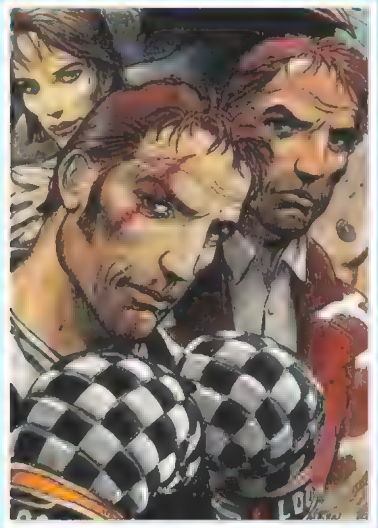


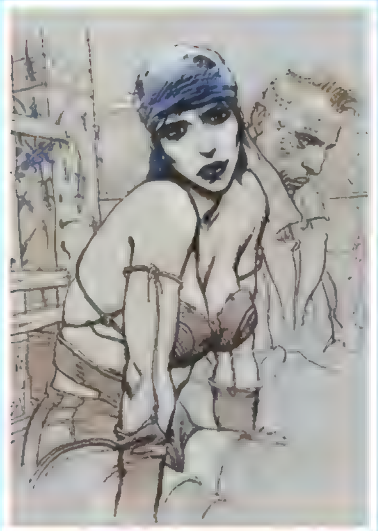
Bilal returned to the saga in 1986 with *The Woman Trap*, spotlighting the enigmatic femme fatale Jill Bioskop (the Serb word for cinema), a blue-haired reporter of the future, addicted to pills that erase memories but not the blood on her hands. He eventually concluded the trilogy with 1992's *Cold Equator*.

Bilal's futures are not radiant paradises but flawed, damaged, weathered by adversity, like his protagonists. His plotting is dense, unpredictable, and repays close attention. There is also a seam of dark, absurdist humour, from the freakish make-up of politicians and the striped alien cat Gogol to the world chess-boxing championship.

In all, *The Nikopol Trilogy* took Bilal 12 years to complete, while he pursued another obsession, filmmaking. Alain







“To understand Bilal, means understanding the history he’s lived through”

Above & below: Bilal’s charismatic characters are hard to forget, in particular the melancholy blue-haired Jill Bioskop.

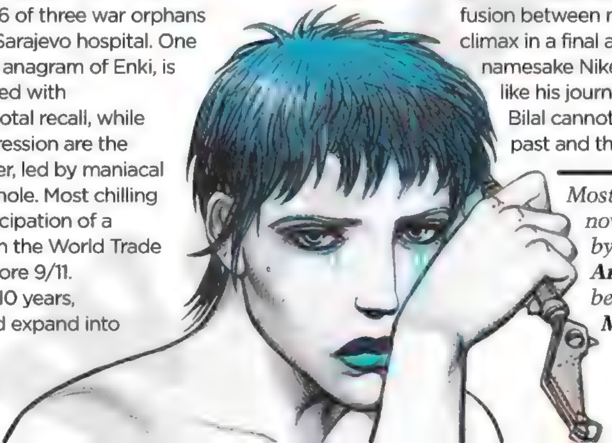
Resnais, a great admirer, commissioned him to design the poster and paint sets onto glass for his films. Then director Michael Mann, in an emergency shooting *The Keep*, flew Bilal to conceive a suitably horrifying monster. In 1989, with guidance from Resnais, Bilal directed his first film, *Bunker Palace Hotel*, a claustrophobic allegory of a corrupt regime’s final days, working again with Pierre Christin on the script and shooting in his birthplace, Belgrade. In his second feature in 1996, a desperate dictator of the moon hunts down Tykko Moon, the amnesiac source of vital brain cells. With a €22 million budget, *Immortel* (2004) gave Bilal the chance to reinterpret parts of *The Nikopol Trilogy* and combine actors with the latest digital effects for some stunning decors, cityscapes and alien Egyptian gods. The film was seen by a million people in France, but failed to get a proper release in the USA. Perhaps his fourth film, adapting his 2009 graphic novel *Animal’z*, will fare better.

FUTURE SHOCK

Fuelled by his directing, Bilal returned to comics with *The Dormant Beast* in 1998. To confront his deep sadness over the Bosnian War, he imagined the future adult lives in 2026 of three war orphans from a bombed Sarajevo hospital. One of them, Nike, an anagram of Enki, is blessed and cursed with hypermnesia or total recall, while the forces of repression are the Obscurantis Order, led by maniacal artist Optus Warhole. Most chilling of all was his anticipation of a terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, years before 9/11.

Over the next 10 years, the project would expand into a tetralogy, whose creation Bilal describes as “a long waking nightmare”. It also marked a liberating shift in his approach by painting more freely and gesturally onto individual panels, and “hybridising the material of paint and the framing of film. I drew quick sketches which I enlarged on the photocopier and then painted, in acrylic, with highlights in pastel.”

Animal’z and *Julia & Roem* have begun his current trilogy, which projects mankind into a challenging realignment with our sentient planet – transformed into an unrecognisable, uncontrollable environment after recovering from a manmade ‘stroke’. Bilal tempers his bleak tomorrow by exploring the prospects of fusion between man and beast, set to climax in a final album next year. Like his namesake Nike with perfect memory, like his journalist Jill Bioskop, Enki Bilal cannot stop remembering the past and the future.



Most of Bilal’s graphic novels were released by DC/Humanoids; ***Animal’z*** *is currently being serialised in* ***Heavy Metal*** *magazine.*

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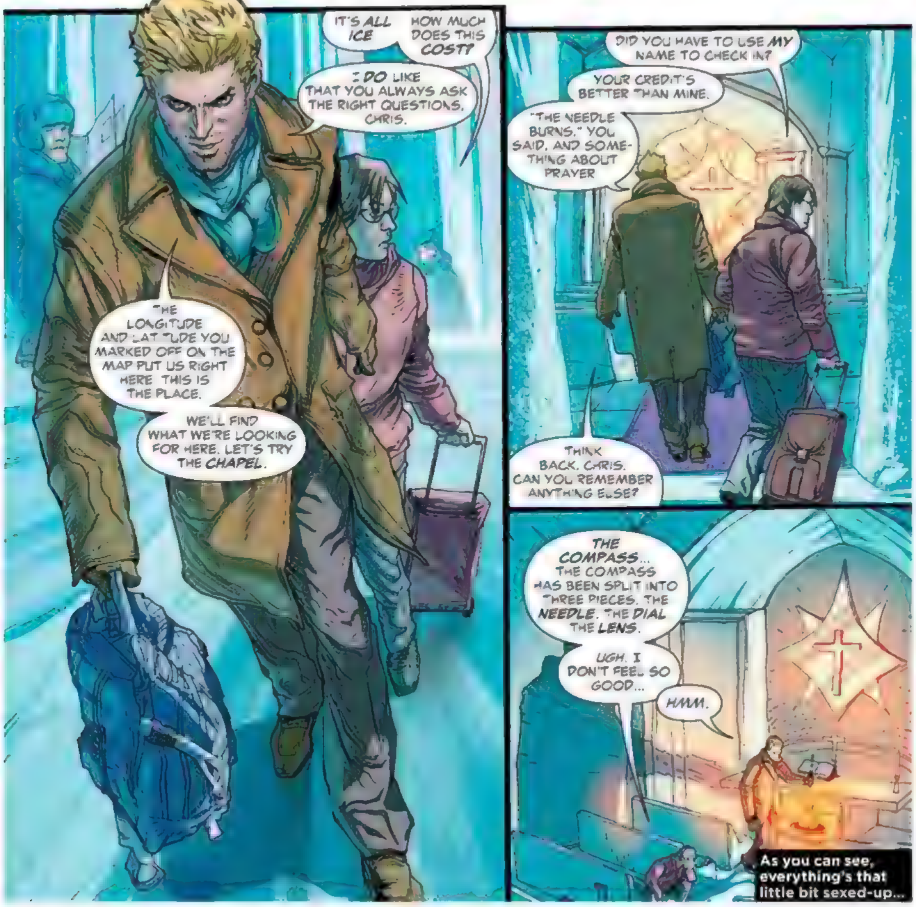
CONSTANTINE

The Vertigo mainstay crash-lands in the New 52; more handsome, more toothless, but does it *work*?


IT'S ALL ICE
HOW MUCH DOES THIS COST?
I DO LIKE THAT YOU ALWAYS ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS, CHRIS.
THE LONGITUDE AND LATITUDE YOU MARKED OFF ON THE MAP PUT US RIGHT HERE. THIS IS THE PLACE.
WE'LL FIND WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR HERE. LET'S TRY THE CHAPEL.
DID YOU HAVE TO USE MY NAME TO CHECK IN?
YOUR CREDIT'S BETTER THAN MINE.
"THE NEEDLE BURNS," YOU SAID, AND SOMETHING ABOUT PRAYER
THINK BACK, CHRIS. CAN YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE?
THE COMPASS... THE COMPASS HAS BEEN SPLIT INTO THREE PIECES. THE NEEDLE, THE DIAL, THE LENS.
UGH. I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD...
HMM.

As you can see, everything's that little bit sexed-up...

NEW COMICS REVIEWED, RATED, AND ARGUED OVER – SOMETIMES ENDLESSLY

Justice is Served!

Our ratings explained, distant alien planet-style...

KRYPTON	★★★★★
OA	★★★★
HALA	★★★
TERMIGHT	★★
APOKOLIPS	★

This Issue's Highlights

90 Messages In A Bottle
92 Marvel Round-Up
94 DC Round-Up
96 Cosmic Marvel
98 Cinebook Round-Up
100 Sláine: The Grail War

COMIC HEROES REVIEWS SPONSORED BY
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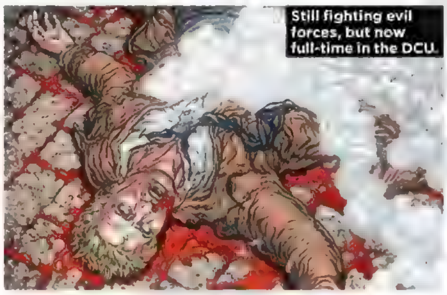
WRITERS: Jeff Lemire & Ray Fawkes
ARTIST: Renato Guedes
PUBLISHER: DC
OUT: Now
★★½

Unfortunately, this has gone kind of the way we feared. Reintroducing John Constantine – the rogue British magician, once based on the look of Sting – into the New 52 version of the DC Universe had everyone worrying about the implications of a more superheroic take on the guy, and though the new version doesn't quite have him casting spells like Zatanna within its pages (though it appears to, on an ill-judged cover), we're currently only one stage removed.

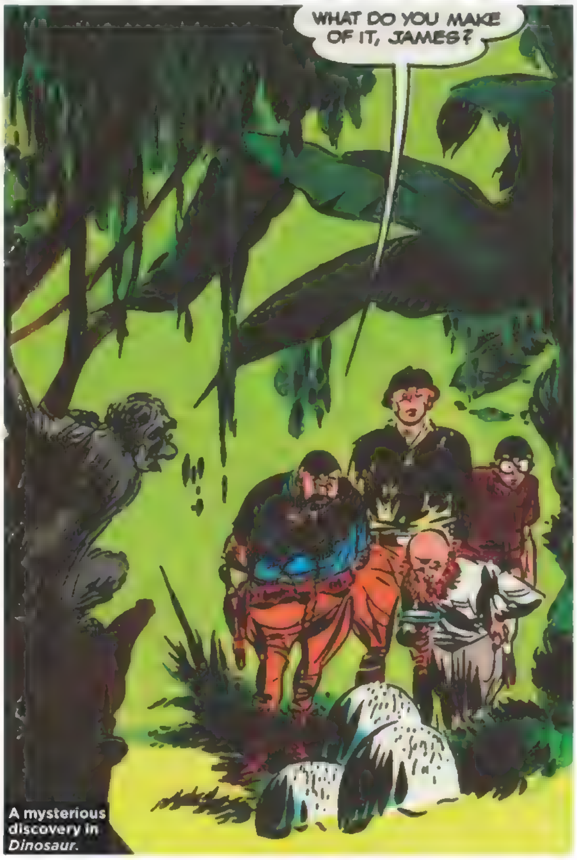
Constantine began as a *Swamp Thing* supporting character in the classic early-'80s Alan Moore era, but during his long-running Vertigo series was effectively removed from the regular DCU – home of Batman et al – to operate in a more horror-based backdrop. Now he's been bounced back, and in a radical fashion – the Vertigo series, *Hellblazer*, has been cancelled, and this replacement guy is younger and better looking, lives in New York not London, and the supernatural forces he comes across are more supervillain-esque and sexed up. Constantine remains both British – he says 'Oi!' and 'Bloody hell!' a few times here – and a selfish bastard though, as a friend discovers to his cost in the first issue.



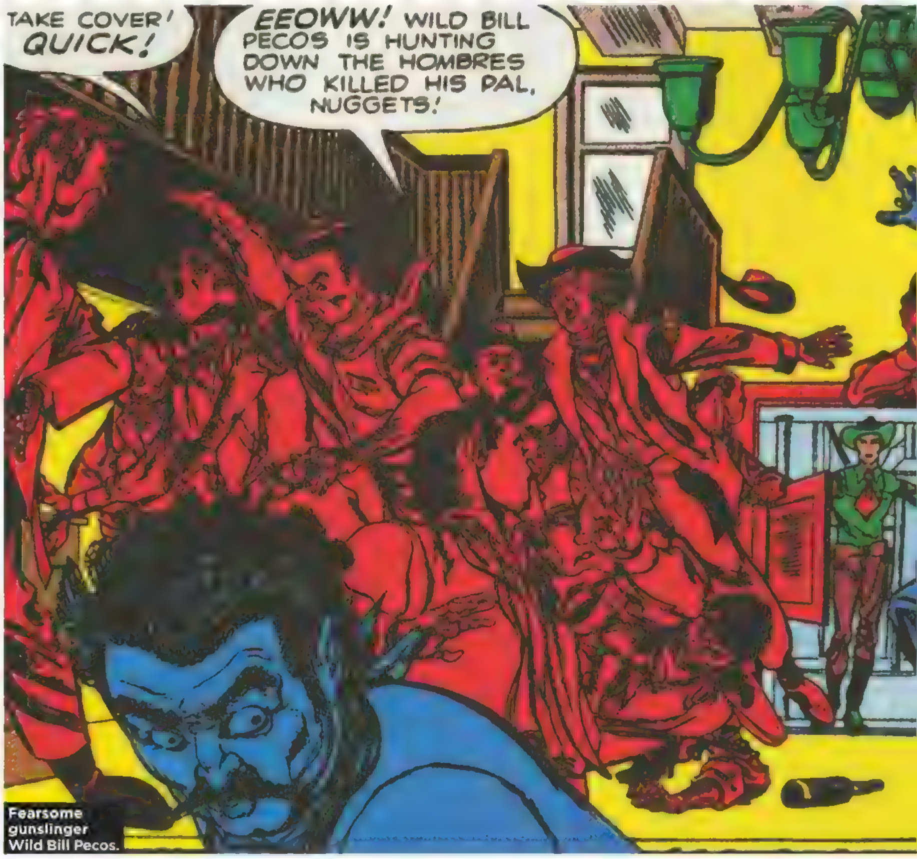
Still fighting evil forces, but now full-time in the DCU.

Does it work? To a point. The art's attractive, with lots of intriguing detail from Renato Guedes, but the figures are surely far too glam for most old-school Constantine fans to really cope with. And though the writing bounces along, bunging our hero into a hoary old race-against-time quest for mystic artifacts seems about as uninspiring a thing to do with the character as you could possibly think of. Plus, the old Constantine knew *stuff*, was always in the wrong place at the right time, and did magic on occasion – but never did he pull off the sort of Doctor Strange fireworks he manages here.

Somewhere along the way, announced writer Robert Venditti has been replaced by the Lemire/Fawkes team – Lemire is quite the talent (we loved his graphic novel *The Underwater Welder*), and Fawkes has written this take on Constantine already, in the pages of *Justice League Dark* – which would perhaps indicate a degree of editorial uncertainty about how quite to treat the character. We'd say they're getting there, but have a way to go yet – for, while this is competent and glossy, it doesn't hold a candle to even the weaker *Hellblazer* periods, let alone the many times it was totally on song. Maybe *Constantine* will be a sales hit – the jury's still out – but, for now, our interest in (and affection for) the character just slumped. **Matt Bielby**


WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, JAMES?

A mysterious discovery in *Dinosaur*.

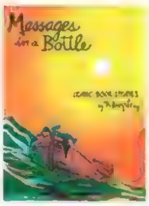

TAKE COVER! QUICK!
EEOWW! WILD BILL PECOS IS HUNTING DOWN THE HOMBRES WHO KILLED HIS PAL, NUGGETS!

Fearsome gunslinger Wild Bill Pecos.

MESSAGES IN A BOTTLE
COMIC BOOK STORIES

Here's a brilliant new collection compiling the work of one of comics' great innovators, half forgotten now – though his influence very much lives on…

STORIES BY: Bernard Krigstein
EDITED BY: Greg Sadowski
OUT: Now
★★★★★

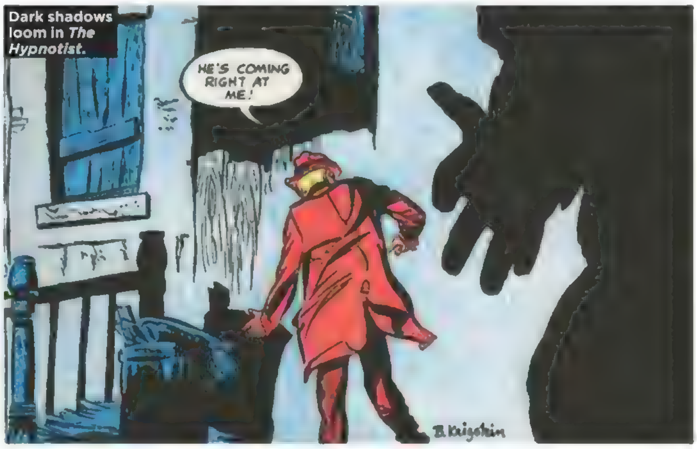


You may not be too familiar with the work of Bernard Krigstein, but damn, what an artist. His career finished before most of us were born, of course – it began with his discharge from the US Army in 1945, and effectively ended following a fall-out with Stan Lee's Atlas Comics in 1957 – and he never worked on the now-hot subjects: superheroes, or even (with the odd exception) science fiction. But in the middle of the century he was one of the great short story artists, telling mini-epics in six pages or less for Hillman, EC and others as well as Atlas, and in all the popular genres: Westerns, horror stories, historical tales and crime dramas.

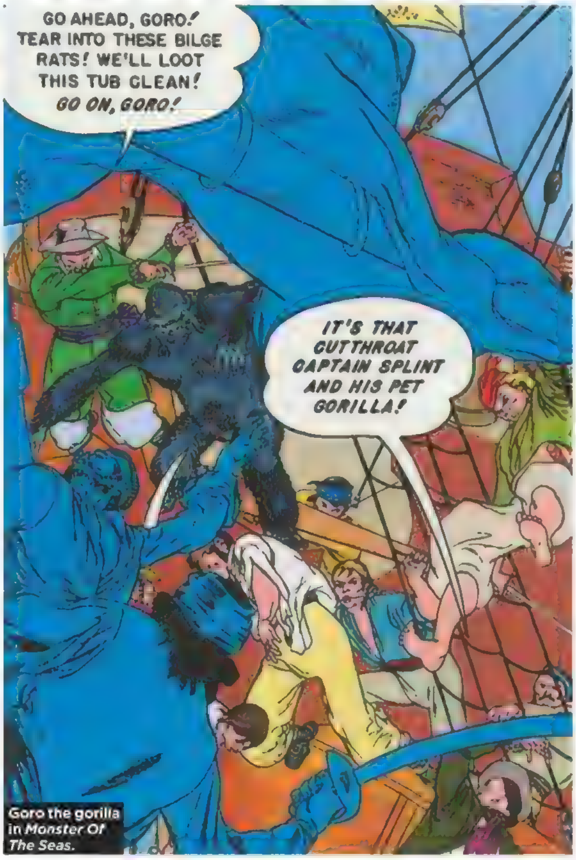
Krigstein's draftsmanship and storytelling were always solid, if often unorthodox, and he was a relentless experimenter with techniques, dropping a form as soon as he thought he had mastered it – in the early '50s, for instance, he eliminated almost all shading and solid black shadows from his work, delivering a clean line and forcing the colour to carry much of the weight. The resulting strips have something of the brilliant effect of a stained-glass window.

The really exciting stuff, however, came towards the end of his career, from the mid-'50s on. Though each company handled things differently, most comic strips of the time came in a fixed format: a large splash panel dominating the first page, layouts dictated by the publisher, and sometimes the lettering done before a single line was drawn too, forcing the artist to work around the words. Now, however, Krigstein asked for some leeway – and got it from Johnny Craig, editor at EC's *Vault Of Horror*. For a heist-goes-wrong tale called *The Catacombs* he was allowed to split the large opening panel into a five-frame sequence, then chop up later panels yet further – a seven-panel page would become 13, many of them arranged in silent little sequences, and the final page would become an 11-frame descent into darkness. Through Krigstein's invention and extra effort, a neat little tale had been transformed into a sophisticated and exciting one.

It was revelatory, and Krigstein started to see, he said, "12 panels, 18 panels, in the same amount of text" where the editor had


HE'S COMING RIGHT AT ME!
B. Krigstein

Dark shadows loom in *The Hypnotist*.


GO AHEAD, GORO! TEAR INTO THESE BILGE RATS! WE'LL LOOT THIS TUB CLEAN! GO ON, GORO!
IT'S THAT CUTTHROAT CAPTAIN SPLINT AND HIS PET GORILLA!

Goro the gorilla in *Monster Of The Seas*.

originally intended there to be no more than six. The last two pages of the otherwise conventional *The Key* (*Crime SuspenStories*, also 1954) boast 35 panels between them, making unforgettable the horror of a man losing his one vital key amongst hundreds of blanks littering a key-shop floor – while *Master Race* from the following year is a work of minor genius, ending with a bravura multi-panel sequence of a fleeing man falling under a train.

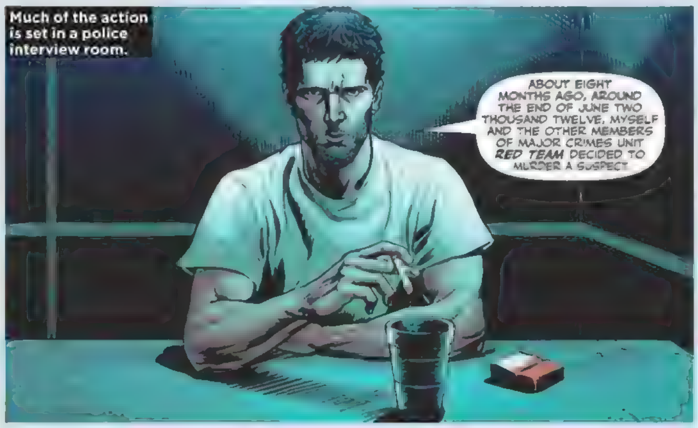
Krigstein would still deliver the odd conventional strip – apart from a single sequence of a sailor from a sunken PT Boat waking on a desert island beach, *Survival!* (*Navy Tales*, 1957) is traditionally told – but the majority of his strips until the end of his career contain stacks of small vertical panels, breaking down a single action in a way that would still seem fresh when a Jim Steranko, Frank Miller or Gil Kane would try it decades later.

Krigstein was gone from the business, painting fine art canvases and teaching at a New York art school when Lee, Kirby and Ditko reinvented Atlas as Marvel, and responded bitterly to praise Lee was getting at the time, accusing him of "miserable taste, flooding the field with... polluted non-stories, treating artists and writers like cattle".

It was certainly a tragedy that Krigstein was never a part of the Marvel revolution, or of any similar comics initiative – he would have relished the relative creative freedom, and the chance to tell book-length narratives, rather than forever be squeezed into four or six pages. That his retirement was effectively forced upon him at the peak of his powers, and with his ambitions at their highest, is one of the minor horrors of the comic book industry.

Messages In A Bottle is a new edition of an out-of-print 2004 collection of Krigstein's work, and contains more than 40 of his best tales, including all those detailed above, with many newly recoloured by the legendary Marie Severin, who'd often worked on them first time around. As you might have guessed, it's a bit of a must-read. **Matt Bielby**

> **“It was a tragedy that Krigstein was never a part of the Marvel revolution”**


ABOUT EIGHT MONTHS AGO, AROUND THE END OF JUNE TWO THOUSAND TWELVE, MYSELF AND THE OTHER MEMBERS OF MAJOR CRIMES UNIT RED TEAM DECIDED TO MURDER A SUSPECT.

Much of the action is set in a police interview room.

RED TEAM

WRITER: Garth Ennis
ARTIST: Craig Cermak
PUBLISHER: Dynamite
OUT: Now
★★★★

Brian Michael Bendis might have all the flashy banter, but Garth Ennis is surely the king of the talking heads comic – he makes a book sing even when it's really just a bunch of people sitting around chatting to each other, thanks in part to his choice of artist (such as this one, the quietly competent but hardly blockbusting Kubert School grad Craig Cermak), but mostly down to his utter control of his medium.

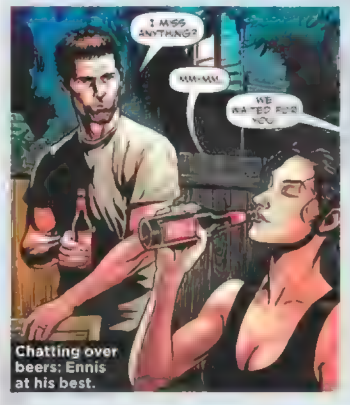
In the first couple of issues of Dynamite's new crime book *Red Team*, Ennis has a six-page natter over beers in a back garden, a four-page gabfest in an office, three pages of chat in a car and eight pages with folk sitting around talking on someone's roof. Breaking this up are brief moments of violence, yes, but rather more of assorted characters talking to the camera, explaining events after the fact. This is not, in any visual sense, an attention-grabbing book.

Doesn't matter, because there's craft here in abundance – as ever with this writer, of course – and a strong hook to the story too. This is basically the tale of David Soul's little gang of rogue highway patrolmen in *Magnum Force*, but told from their side: a tight-knit group of four gangbusting elite cops – two grizzled veterans, a hot chick with something to prove, and a younger guy, the conscience of the team – cross a fateful line, deciding to cold-bloodedly murder the worst-of-the-worst they come across, not risk them getting off on technicalities and all that vigilante movie guff. It's a familiar basic tale, but told with such calm reason that their inevitable descent into a hell of their own making appears surprisingly fresh and new.

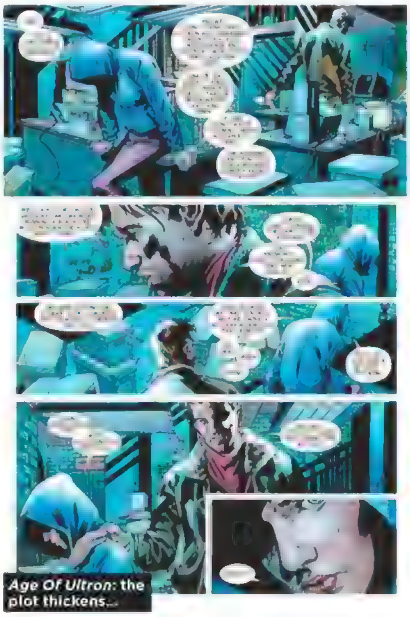
> **“As ever, there's craft here in abundance”**

This is the first of a promised new crime line from Dynamite, though nothing here makes that clear; nor is it explained whether we're buying into this tale for the long haul or not, though it's said to be a seven-issue miniseries. Clearly influenced by the recent generation of American TV crime dramas, it mixes these with elements of Marvel's *The Punisher* (which Ennis wrote for so long, of course), but here played for real.

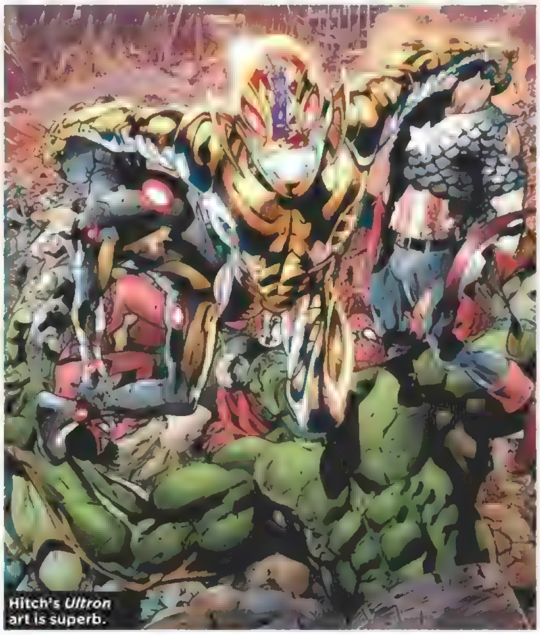
A muted book, with Ennis' sense of humour dialled way down in the mix, it's unlikely to be one of his biggest hits – it's too restrained and intimate for that – but there's a good chance it'll prove to be one of his best; think an extended version of one of his war stories, perhaps, but in a contemporary domestic setting. There's little praise that's higher than that. **Matt Bielby**


I MISS ANYTHING?
MM-HM.
WE WAITED FOR YOU.

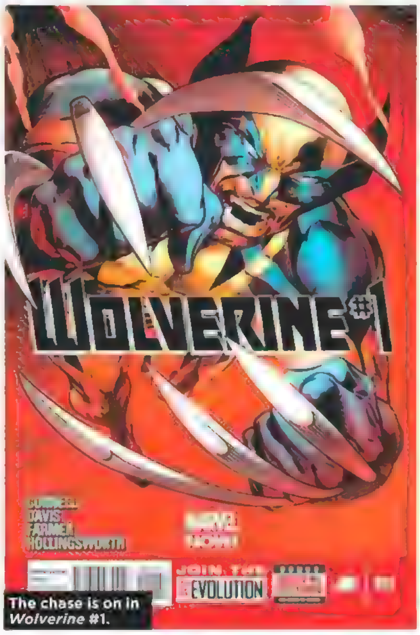
Chatting over beers: Ennis at his best.



Age Of Ultron: the plot thickens...



Hitch's Ultron art is superb.



The chase is on in Wolverine #1.

MARVEL ROUND-UP

AGE OF ULTRON
WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTISTS: Bryan Hitch, Paul Neary & Paul Mounts
OUT: Now
★★★

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY
WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTISTS: Steve McNiven, John Dell & Justin Posnor
OUT: Now
★★★★★

THANOS RISING
WRITER: Jason Aaron
ARTISTS: Simone Bianchi
OUT: Now
★★★

WOLVERINE
WRITER: Paul Cornell
ARTISTS: Alan Davis, Mark Farmer & Matt Hollingsworth
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE FEARLESS DEFENDERS
WRITER: Cullen Bunn
ARTIST: Will Sliney
OUT: Now
★★★★

Movie build-up aside, some of Marvel's moves seem baffling – now *space* is flavour of the month? – but you can't deny the fun...

After the universe-changing conclusion of last year's *Avengers Vs X-Men* extravaganza – not only a huge story, you'll remember, but one that ushered in the brand new dawn of Marvel Now! too – you have to wonder where the House of Ideas can go next with regard to its annual summer crossover event. Surely everything's been done?

Well, not quite, it would appear, as they've wasted no time bouncing right into something new, namely *Age Of Ultron*, a dark, dystopian epic from Brian Michael Bendis and Bryan Hitch which actually appears to have been in the pipeline for several years.

Originally created by Hank Pym way back in 1968's *Avengers* #54, Ultron's a particularly malevolent artificial intelligence/unstoppable robot type with major daddy issues, and has long been a thorn in the Avengers' sides. In this 10-part limited series, however, he has really outdone himself. Set in a post-apocalyptic America that has actually been taken over by the evil robot, the first issue features Hawkeye rescuing a helpless Peter Parker – who appears to be back to his old self, rather than in his current *Superior* incarnation – from the clutches of the Owl and his cronies in devastated New York, while #2 sees Moon Knight and Black Widow teaming up in an equally ruined San Francisco.

With no explanation yet as to how Ultron came to assume control of the world, or any indication as to how it affects the Marvel Universe as a whole – Bendis claims that the series *is* in continuity – *Age Of Ultron* initially frustrates as much as it enthrals. However, with issues being released on a fortnightly basis, hopefully a few answers won't be too far off – and, in the meantime, there are plenty of compensatory pleasures here.

While Bendis' well-paced scripts are higher in tension than they are in substance so far, there's another superstar being given real time and space to shine here: artist Bryan Hitch, whose ever-lavish, intricately constructed art always impresses, is on absolute top form. His best since *The Ultimates*? Quite possibly.

Heaving with widescreen shots and double page splashes, *Age Of Ultron* can make for some very brisk reading, but it's worth lingering on each individual panel, as they're often packed with detail, some of which is easy to miss – take Hawkeye's reflection on Ultron's metal forehead on #1's cover, for instance. For consistency sake, it's disappointing that Hitch isn't drawing the entire series – Brandon Peterson and Carlos Pacheco take over for the second half of the run – but you should enjoy his lively partnership with Bendis while it lasts.

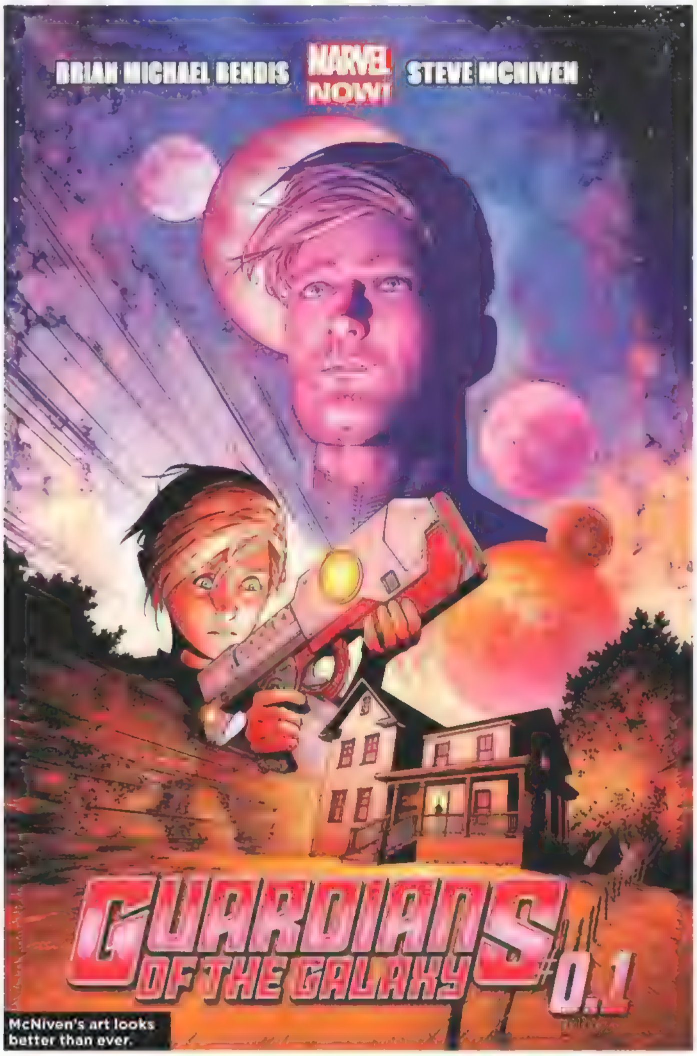
SPACE OPERA

After turning a mostly B-list character like Tony Stark into a household-name – thank the post-'Extremis' comics, plus the various Iron Man and Avengers movies for that – Marvel faces an even tougher task with *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, a terribly obscure act who've rarely even troubled the C-list, and never had a proper hit comic.

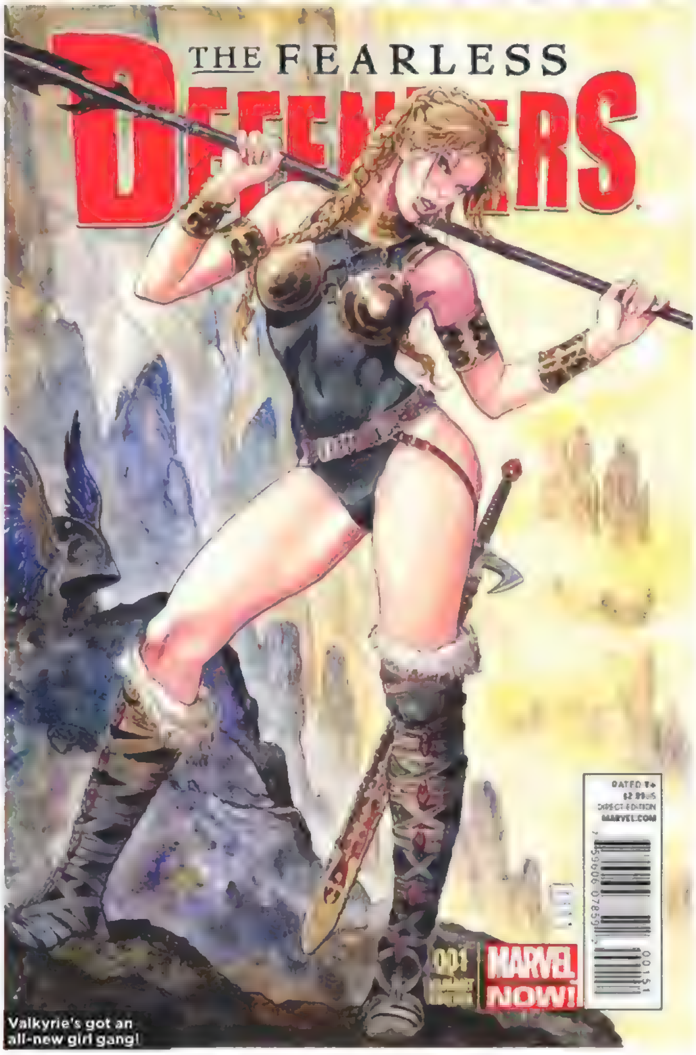
Still, something's shining on them, for – aiding the build-up to 2015's James Gunn-directed *Guardians* blockbuster movie – the *Star Wars*-esque collective are now enjoying their first new monthly in an age, helmed by the ubiquitous Brian Michael Bendis, who counts the origin of Peter Quill's Star-Lord as one of his favourite ever comic book stories.

Not to be confused with the Tharg-esque fictional editor of the

> **“Bryan Hitch is on absolute top form. His best since *The Ultimates*? Quite possibly”**



McNiven's art looks better than ever.

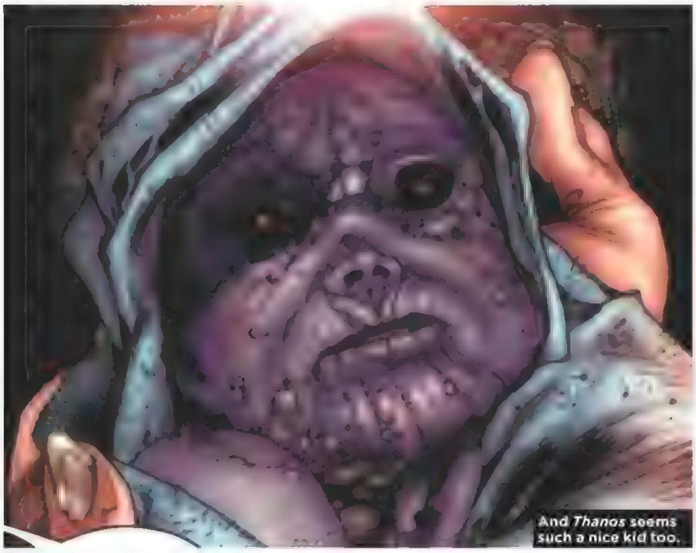


Valkyrie's got an all-new girl gang!

late British '80s weekly of the same name, Star-Lord's early days were originally related in a mere two pages of 1976's *Marvel Preview* #4, but somehow they made a mark on the young Bendis, who devotes most of a special double-sized #0.1 issue to retelling the half-human/half-alien warrior's formative years.

In a neat variation on Superman's iconic cosmic origin, it begins with his father, a Spartax prince, crash-landing to Earth in the Colorado Mountains, where local woman Meredith Quill saves him. As she nurses him back to health, they inevitably fall in love. With Bendis' heartfelt script brought evocatively to life by Steve McNiven's fluid cartooning, you can tell that *Guardians Of The Galaxy* is a labour of love for all concerned.

Meanwhile, eagle-eyed readers will notice young Peter at one point reading a copy of classic 1978 Marvel anthology *Marvel Premiere* #41, featuring *Seeker 3000*. Those were the days it seems Bendis and McNiven are keen to recreate here.



And *Thanos* seems such a nice kid too.

Oddly enough, the Guardians aren't the only Marvel space-faring heroes making a comeback, with Nova also awarded a new monthly (see review, page 96) and this trio of new Cosmic Marvel Now! titles rounded out by *Thanos Rising*, a five-issue mini-series (though it says that nowhere on the comic itself) that reads like a cross between John Wagner's *Young Death: Boyhood of a Superfiend* and one of those *Star Trek: TNG* eps with Wesley Crusher.

Simon Bianchi's smooth, spooky art adds weight and intrigue to a fun-but-unsurprising tale of an odd mutant kid growing up amongst the perfect Eternal high-schoolers of Titan "many years ago."

GIRL POWER

After a couple of years exclusive at the Distinguished Competition, it's great to see Paul Cornell back at the House of Ideas. With Logan battling dinosaurs and teaming up with Shanna in companion title *Savage Wolverine*, (adjectiveless) *Wolverine* should be considered the Clawed Canuck's flagship solo book. Focusing on a siege at a mall involving a mysterious but deadly assailant, 'Hunting Season' hits the ground running, beginning with Alan Davis' memorable opening splash of a seriously injured Wolvie declaring 'It's okay; I'm a superhero'. Meanwhile, a chase sequence involving our hero and a runaway police car pays a wry tribute to *The Terminator*.

Elsewhere, while *The Fearless Defenders*' all-female line-up is clearly a blatantly attention-seeking move, Cullen Bunn and Will Sliney's masterstroke here is that there's an actual *reason* for the move. After Matt Fraction's much-hyped recent attempt to revive *The Defenders* lasted barely 12 months, Valkyrie's quest to recruit the likes of Misty Knight, a now non-powered Dani Moonstar and the engaging Dr Annabelle Riggs to the ranks of her Shieldmaidens has not only reinvigorated Marvel's notoriously inconsistent non-team, but has also elevated the Asgardian warrior to a leading character status worthy of Thor himself. With luck, the Fearless Defenders are here to stay. **Stephen Jewell**

The Emerald Archer's been well rebooted.

There's a new team in *JLA* to rival *this* lot...

DC ROUND-UP

Promising new series, shock departures and unexpected gems in the New 52

BATMAN INCORPORATED

WRITER: Grant Morrison

ARTIST: Chris Burnham

OUT: Now

★★★★★

GREEN ARROW

WRITER: Jeff Lemire

ARTIST: Andrea Sorrentino

OUT: Now

★★★★☆

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

WRITER: Geoff Johns

ARTIST: David Finch

OUT: Now

★★★★☆

ALL-STAR WESTERN FEATURING JONAH HEX

WRITERS: Justin Gray & Jimmy Palmiotti

ARTIST: Moritat

OUT: Now

★★★½☆

SWORD OF SORCERY FEATURING AMETHYST

WRITER: Christy Marx

ARTIST: Aaron Lopestri

OUT: Now

★★★★½

The big DC news that's got the fan forums all a-fluster is, of course, the death of Robin. Damian Wayne shuffles off his mortal coil, falls off his perch, joins the choir invisible etc, in *Batman Incorporated* #8, where he is brutally beaten and then run through with a massive sword by his monstrous, mysterious clone brother. What makes it even worse is that his mother, Talia, actively – if reluctantly – sanctions the killing, deeming it acceptable as part of her 'hell hath no fury' scheme to break Batman by destroying everything he holds dear.

It's a startling shock moment and, yes, the complainers are right, there *is* something a little distasteful about the murder of a child being paraded before us for our entertainment. Grant Morrison at least has the decency to give Robin a hero's death – he dies helping to defend Gotham – and imbues the moment with genuine pathos. This is no mere 'Death In The Family' sales-boosting stunt; rather, an effective narrative twist. It'll be interesting to see where Batman goes from here. Even further into the dark would be the logical assumption.

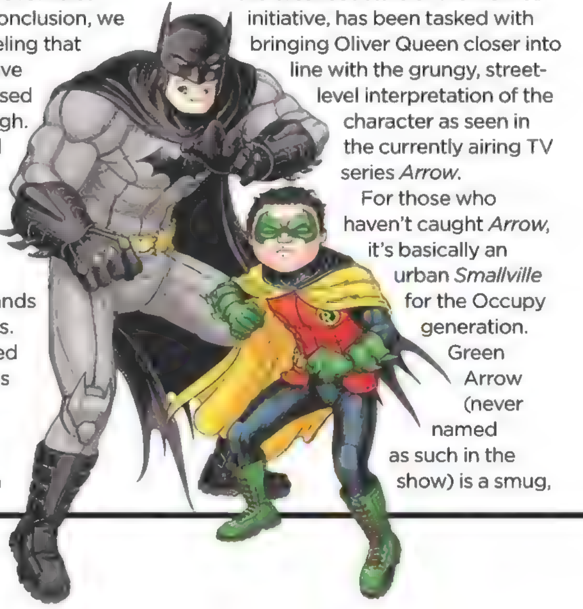
Whether Robin actually stays dead is another matter. Let's face it, mortality never tends to stick where superheroes are concerned, and Robins in particular have form when it comes to miraculous, Lazarus-like resurrection.

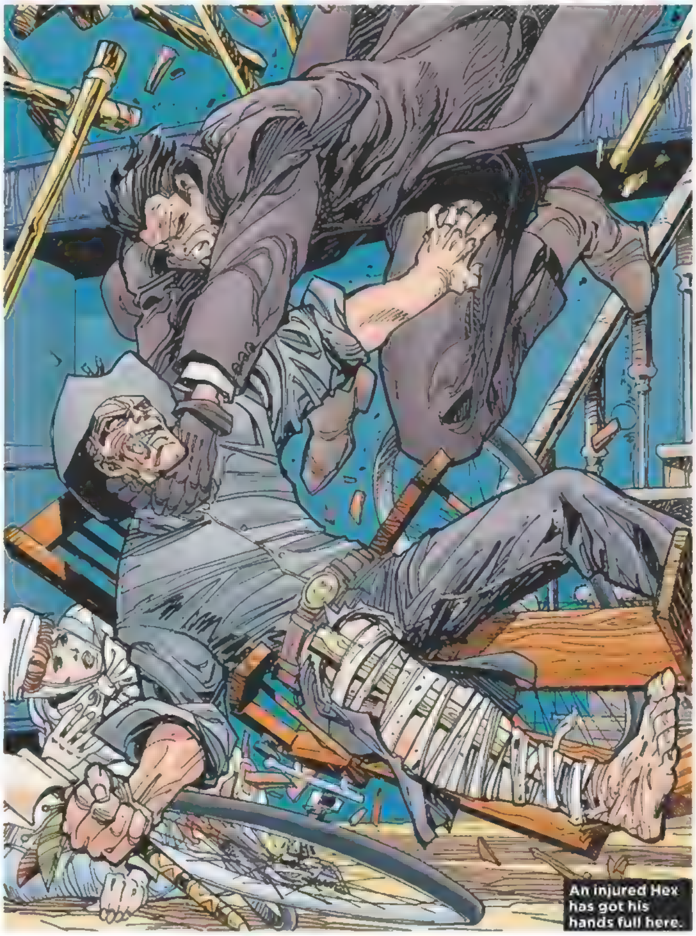
Nonetheless, as Morrison's 'Leviathan' arc rumbles towards its conclusion, we can't help feeling that the stakes have now been raised intolerably high. Damian, in all his brattish arrogance, was a hard character to like, but in Morrison's hands he grew on us. He'll be missed (for as long as he's gone), and Batman himself, grief-stricken at the loss of his son, may well find himself contemplating retaliatory acts that he would before now never have considered.

GOOD IN THE HOOD

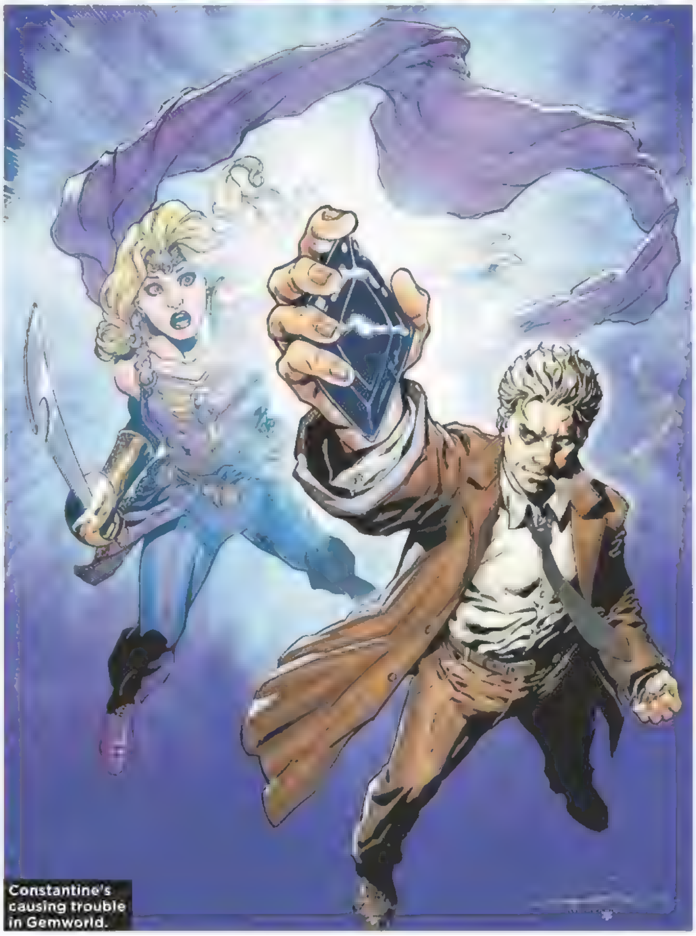
Meanwhile, DC's other non-powered billionaire masked vigilante, Green Arrow, undergoes a major makeover with #17 of his own title. Jeff Lemire, one of the breakout stars of the New 52 initiative, has been tasked with bringing Oliver Queen closer into line with the grungy, street-level interpretation of the character as seen in the currently airing TV series *Arrow*.

For those who haven't caught *Arrow*, it's basically an urban *Smallville* for the Occupy generation. Green Arrow (never named as such in the show) is a smug,





An injured Hex has got his hands full here.



Constantine's causing trouble in Gemworld.

entitled rich kid who spends five years stranded on a Pacific Island getting beaten up and taught the use of a bow and arrow, all revealed in repetitive and tedious flashback. When he returns home, he's a changed man: still smug, but with a new sense of purpose, namely to bring down the fatcat bad guys who have ruined his city. Everything is lo-fi and spandex-free. Familiar characters appear – Huntress, Royal Flush Gang, Firefly – but, names apart, they bear scant resemblance to their DCU counterparts. Nods toward the Robin Hood legend are frequent and overt.

Arrow has been a huge ratings hit but it's not, to be honest, that great a show. Lemire's comic, on the other hand, offers intriguing potential. The first issue hits the reset button hard. Pre-existing continuity is erased with a literal bang, Queen Industries is bankrupted, and a new bowman foe, Komodo, is introduced. Andrea Sorrentino provides jagged, photo-referenced art in the manner of Alex Maleev and JH Williams III, and all in all this looks like it's going to be a worthwhile run.

Green Arrow cameos in the first issue of *Justice League Of America* too. This new *JLA* is a collection of second-tier characters – Martian Manhunter, Catwoman, Katana, the new Green Lantern (Simon Baz), Vibe, Stargirl and Hawkman – being assembled into a team by Amanda Waller and Steve Trevor. Their job is to oppose threats to US national security and act as a substitute Justice League, a reserve squad with the capacity to take the League down should something go drastically wrong.

Most of the issue is devoted to establishing the premise, with Waller and Trevor defining the JLA's purpose and discussing their preferred candidates. It's a slow-burn start, and we've yet to see how the team members will gel and interact. One suspects tension and rivalry will be the order of the day, since the choices for inclusion are being made according to power set, not personal compatibility. Geoff Johns sets plenty of plates spinning, however, and David Finch's art brings a tone of appropriate moodiness. This promises to be an enjoyable title, a shadowy counterpart to *Justice League*'s bright, primary-colour superheroics.

> **“Whether Robin actually stays dead is another matter”**

GUNS & GIRLS

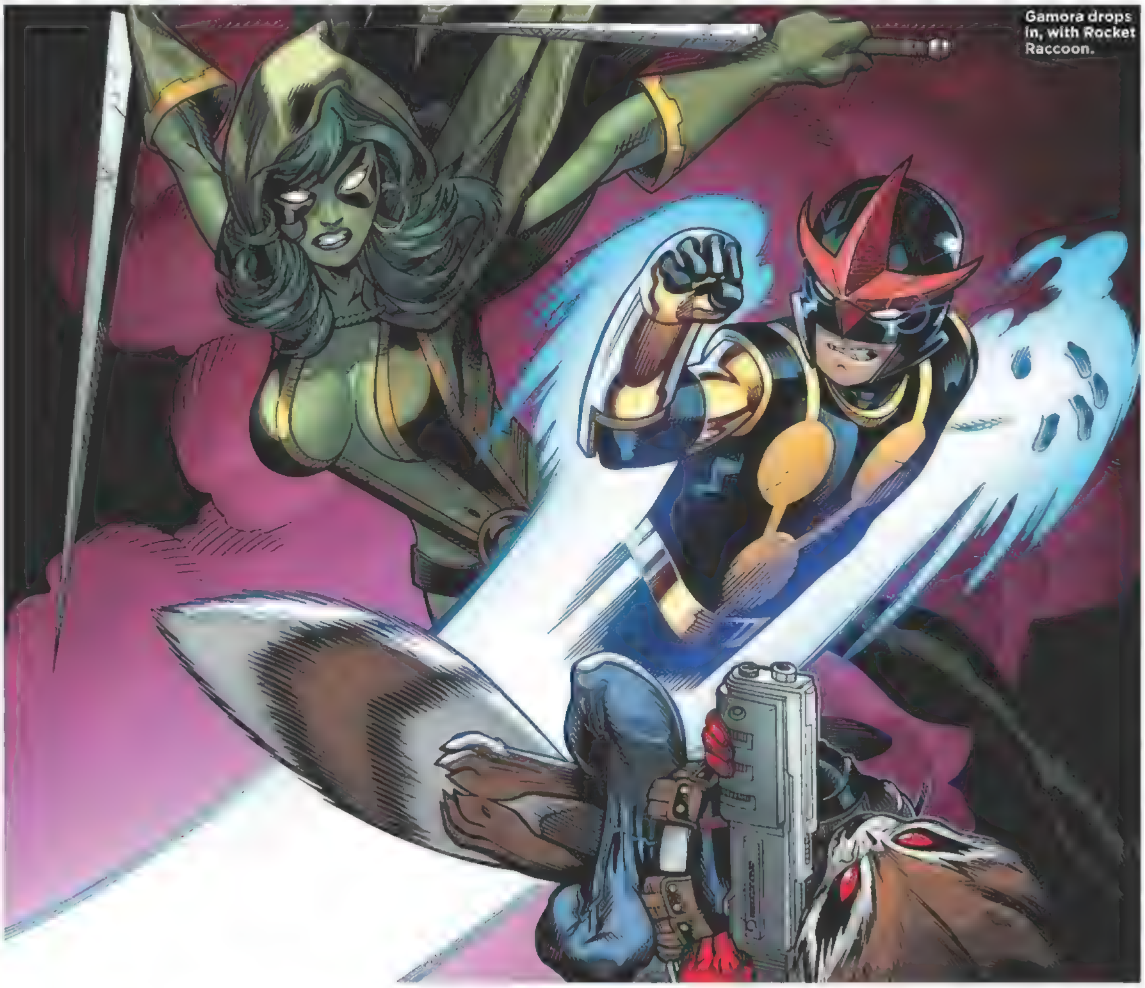
At the hands of scripting duo Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti, *All-Star Western*'s lead strip, *Jonah Hex*, has brought the scarred bounty hunter firmly into DC continuity. Most of the action takes place in newly-founded Gotham, a benighted cesspit even in its infancy, and the current story arc, just beginning in #17, draws the immortal Vandal Savage into Hex's orbit. Savage comes to the city, carrier of a disease to which he himself is immune. The symptoms resemble cholera and rabies, but it's a cannibal-zombie plague by any other name, and when Hex enters the quarantine zone in order to rescue a friend's wife – for money, naturally – the mission quickly degenerates into a run-or-be-eaten shambles.

Swiss artist Moritat brings a lovely, expressive European feel to the action, while British artist Staz Johnson ably illustrates the debut episode of the book's new back-up strip, *19th Century Stormwatch*.

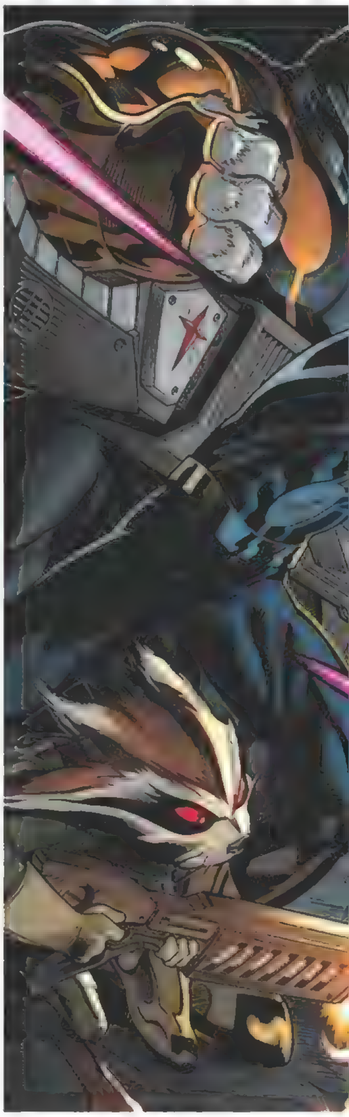
Sword Of Sorcery similarly features a nice spanking-new back-up strip, a revamp of the '70s Paul Levitz/Steve Ditko fantasy creation *Stalker*. However, it's the main strip, *Amethyst*, that commands attention.

Amethyst, Princess Of Gemworld, for all its Saturday morning cartoon title, was a wonderful, woefully underrated mid-'80s maxiseries graced with gorgeous Ernie Colón illustration – a proper, intelligent girls' comic at a time when such things were rare. The originals can be picked up relatively cheap, or there's the black-and-white *Showcase Presents* collection.

The New 52 *Amethyst* is equally as good. If you can get past the clichéd trad-fantasy premise – regular world lass discovers she's otherworld royalty, with powers – you'll find a richly detailed, action-packed story centred on a headstrong but credible young woman, the whole thing capped off with beautiful, flowing artwork. Christy Marx and Aaron Lopestri have come up trumps here, and even if *Amethyst* may not sound like your cup of tea, really it is. **James Lovegrove**



Gamora drops in, with Rocket Raccoon.



COSMIC MARVEL

Marvel's space heroes get a reboot, just in time for the *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie...

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY
WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTIST: Steve McNiven
OUT: Now
★★★☆☆

NOVA
WRITER: Jeph Loeb
ARTIST: Ed McGuinness
OUT: Now
★★½☆☆

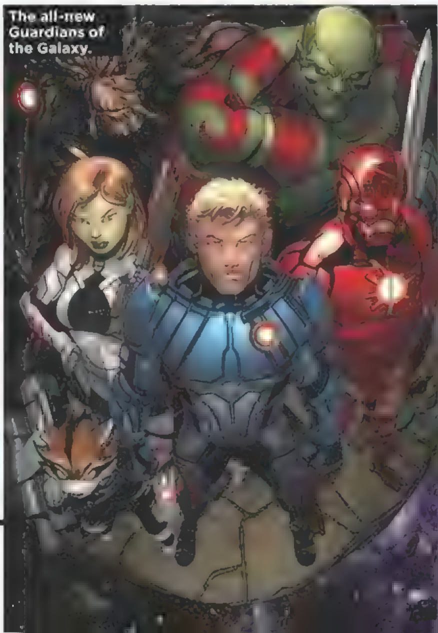
'Cosmic Marvel' has mostly been a loose umbrella for the company's space-based characters, and (though it's bubbled along since the early days of the *Fantastic Four*) has really risen to prominence twice before – in the '70s, when many of these heroes and villains (Captain Marvel, Thanos, Adam Warlock, The Man Called Nova, Quasar et al) were first in their pomp, and more recently under creators like Keith Giffen, Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, who gave the whole 'Cosmic' concept a huge shot in the arm with the 2006 crossover *Annihilation* and follow-ups like *Annihilation: Conquest* and *War Of Kings*, which dragged into the mix the Silver Surfer, Galactus, Super-Skrull, Drax the Destroyer, Ronan the Accuser, the Inhumans and many more.

Now, it seems – with Thanos the promised Big Bad of the next *Avengers* film, and a *Guardians of the Galaxy* flick due next year – 'Cosmic' is flavour of the month again, and so it is that we get new series featuring some of these characters by a dream team of Marvel's biggest creative guns.

The original Guardians of the Galaxy was a 31st century *Blake's 7*-style rebel outfit in a universe dominated by the aggressive, lizard-like alien species the Badoon; they were prominent in their own series (and as guest stars) in the mid-'70s, and again in the '90s. The current gang are something different: they (through the power of time travel) are simply inspired by, and named for, the much later group, though they share key member Peter Quill, aka Star-Lord, the half-human space adventurer with a confusing backstory – even by Marvel standards.

His new group are pro-active, self-appointed protectors of space, and had their first, post-*Annihilation: Conquest* series cancelled in 2010: now, somewhat re-thought, they're back, the roster including '70s Jim Starlin creations like green-skinned super-assassin Gamora and Drax the Destroyer; anthropomorphic forest beast Rocket Raccoon; and the Ent-like Groot, an alien tree-creature originally created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby as an invading monster for *Tales Of Astonish* in 1960 – incredibly, he's an even more ancient creation than the Fantastic Four.

We cover the 'pre-credits sequence' issue of *GOTG* in the Marvel Round-Up this issue – called 0.1, it's a retelling of Star-Lord's origin, once again – but #1 proper is a much busier affair, again introducing Quill, his space-emperor father, a new, semi-nonsensical space-pact amongst the various warlike empires to stop interfering with Earth, and members Drax, Gamora, Rocket and Groot, plus guest member Iron Man, here apparently cruising randomly about the cosmos in his painfully



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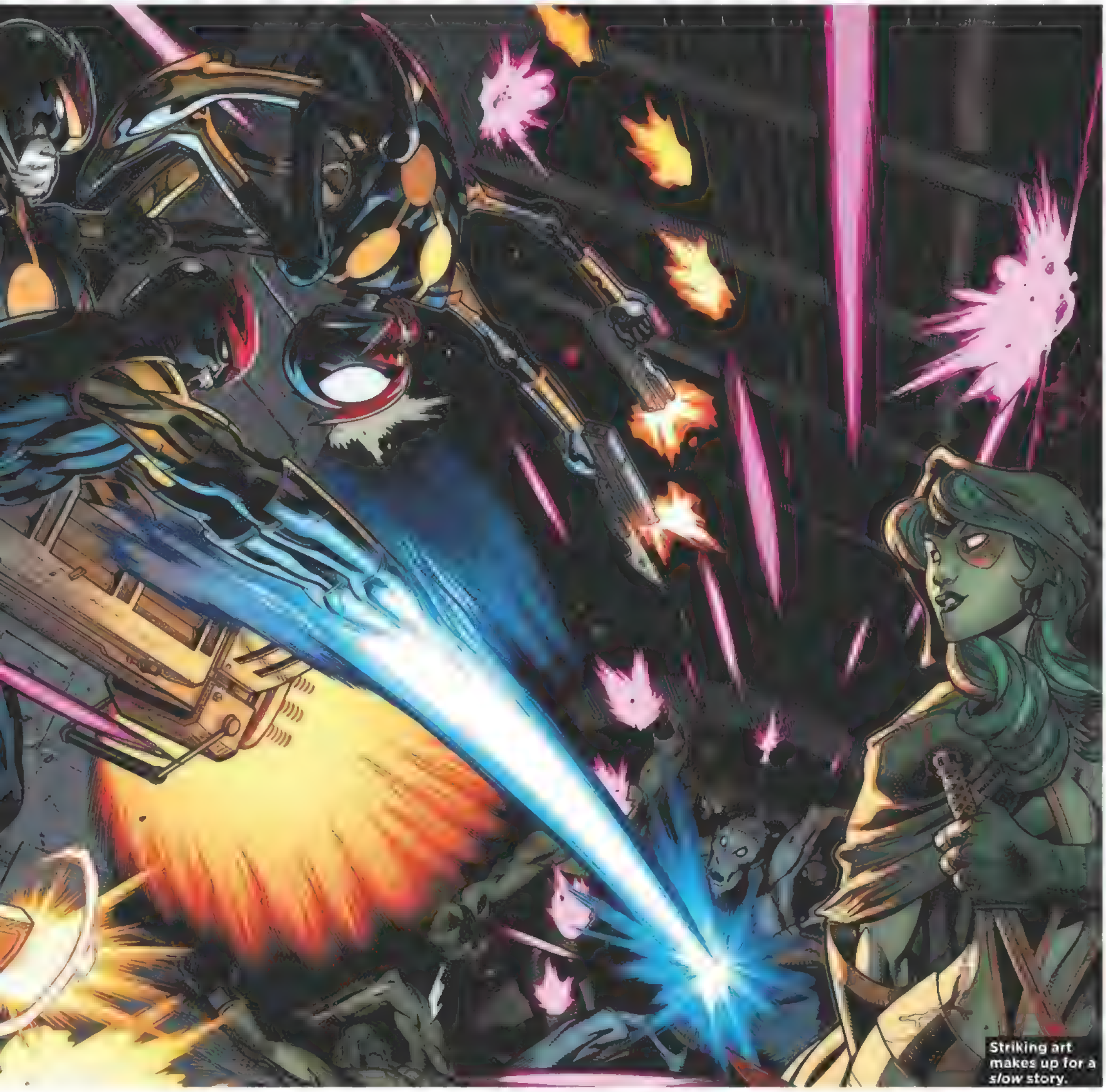
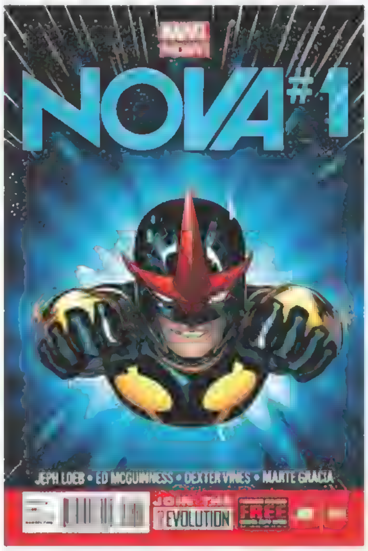


Striking art makes up for a slow story.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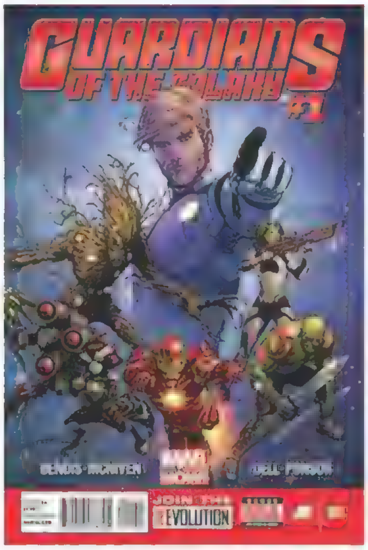


ugly new space armour. (Artist McNiven isn't to blame for this, but his redesigns of Star-Lord and Gamora here are similarly generic and bland, and his work annoyingly patchy throughout – certainly, his action sequences are a great deal stronger than his stiff and posed quieter moments.)

This is one of those comics where loads seem to be happening at the same time as nothing much at all. Assorted Badoon are killed – but that's alright, because they're just lizard-men, right? – and the familiar editorial sloppiness of much current Marvel makes its presence felt. Like, how did the Guardians get from some space bar on the far side of the Milky Way to Earth orbit in what appears to be no more than two minutes? Why is IM's armour so weak that a space explosion puts him out of commission but hardly scratches any of the Guardians? And why does the Badoon spaceship here – though immediately recognised by Tony Stark as 'similar to those logged from previous interactions' look absolutely nothing like the Badoon ship shown in companion title *Nova*? This being Bendis, there are of course (useless space-swear word 'krutack' aside) neat little bits of dialogue, but overall this is disappointingly sloppy, aimless stuff.

TERRA NOVA

Though created in the '60s, Nova is basically a '70s character – his first series (introducing a young, very ordinary hero with space-police powers) was a neat splicing of the Spider-Man and Green Lantern mythologies, and he's been back numerous times since – though perhaps never again, since the original Earth-based Nova, Richard Ryder, seemingly sacrificed himself in a recent cosmic storyline.

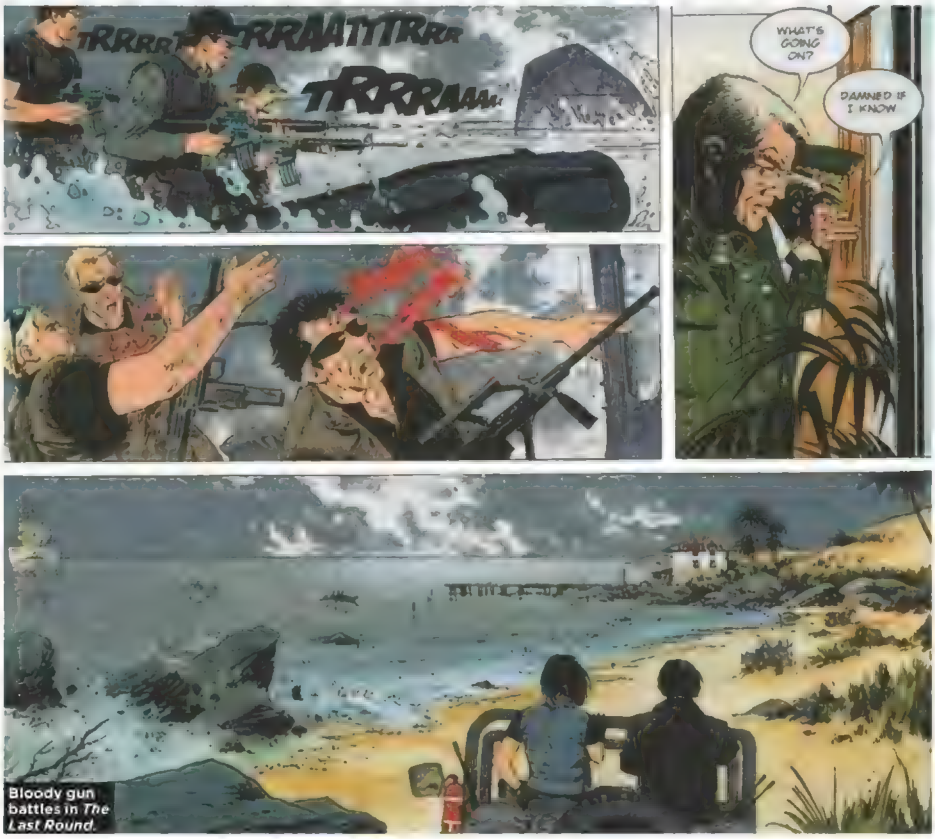
> **❝ Yup, there are rather too many splash pages, but it's never less than pleasing to look at ❞**

The star of this new Jeph Loeb *Nova* series, then, is a brand new guy – Sam Alexander, a 15-year-old from some middle-of-nowhere Arizona town, whose harmless drunk dad had always told bedtime tales of his time in the Nova corps. The question: were they as fanciful as Sam and his sister believed?

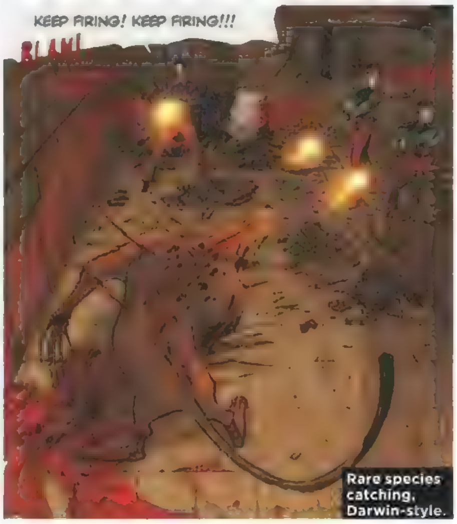
So far, this is a harmless retelling of a standard Luke Skywalker-type tale, but it's a painfully slow one too: pretty much all that's happened in two issues so far is some flashbacks to Nova-dad's adventures, some moping around, a fleeting visit from Gamora and Rocket Raccoon, and Sam trying on a stray Nova helmet and flying around a bit. It's glacial storytelling – and, as such, surely totally unsuited to someone described as a 'human rocket'?

Nova is not bad, then, just boring. Not only is this arse-before-face storytelling – we first met this guy a good year ago, in the pages of *Avengers Vs X-Men* and elsewhere, and we're just getting his origin *now* – but it's painfully familiar stuff throughout, lacking a single even semi-original thought in its head. The saving grace? McGuinness' smooth, open, cartoony art; yes, some of the page layouts are a bit random and disjointed, yes, the *Back To The Future* references are laid on a bit thick, and yup, there are rather too many splash pages, but it's never less than pleasing to look at.

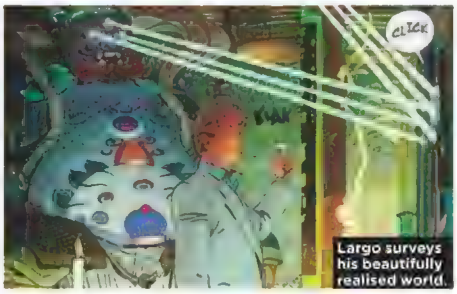
This current take on Cosmic Marvel gets off to a so-so start then; it's pretty enough, but it seems directionless, uninspired and horribly slow-moving too. Certainly not a patch on the Cosmic stuff Marvel was doing six or seven years ago, when all eyes were elsewhere. We're not jumping spaceship just yet, but it's time for *someone* to up their game. **Paul Marland**



Bloody gun battles in *The Last Round*.


KEEP FIRING! KEEP FIRING!!!
BLAM!

Rare species catching, Darwin-style.



Largo surveys his beautifully realised world.

CINEBOOK ROUND-UP

One of the greatest BD adventure series comes to an end, as does *Darwin's Diaries*...

DARWIN'S DIARIES: DUAL NATURE

WRITER: Sylvain Runberg
ARTIST: Eduardo Ocana
OUT: Now
★★★★★

LARGO WINCH: THE THREE EYES OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE TAO

WRITER: Jean Van Hamme
ARTIST: Philippe Francq
OUT: Now
★★★★☆

XIII: THE LAST ROUND

WRITER: Jean Van Hamme
ARTIST: William Vance
OUT: Now
★★★★★

Most of the high-quality Belgian-French comic albums published by Cinebook seem to come in endless series – we're on Vol 39 of *Lucky Luke*, with more to come – but *Darwin's Diaries* is a shorter tale, just three volumes long, and quite one of the oddest Cinebook has yet published. Yes, this Darwin is the familiar Charles of HMS Beagle and *On The Origin Of Species* fame, but here painted as quite the two-fisted supernatural investigator, boozing it up, keeping the company of prostitutes and tasked by the PM himself, no less, to solve some mysterious beast attacks in deepest Yorkshire.

The first couple of volumes were all about whodunnit, with strange druids, the building of a railway, hot female emancipation-types and Darwin himself, seemingly going increasingly off the rails, taking centre stage, but slowly the creature attacks have been building, and by this third and concluding part it's all about the beasts – a whole colony, in fact, of werewolf-like transforming men, a sub-species of humanity that's kept itself to itself, but now sees a chance to come out into the open and rule. It's a bold premise, heaving with atmosphere and beautifully drawn, with both creators on top form.

Sylvain Runberg has come up with an intriguing, well-paced tale, and disguises just how loopy it is in effective fashion by weight of period detail and imaginative twists, while artist Eduardo Ocana is simply astounding: buildings and countryside are beautifully rendered, oppressive doom is ever-present, and the creatures themselves are stunning creations – huge, high-leaping, somewhat feline, and utterly deadly. I can't think of a beast attack in any comic as frighteningly effective as these are – you feel their speed and power as men, tigers, and anything else that stumbles into their path are ripped to pieces, jawbones and limbs flying off-panel in attacks almost too fast for the eye to follow. It's superb, and a great way into the Cinebook offering.

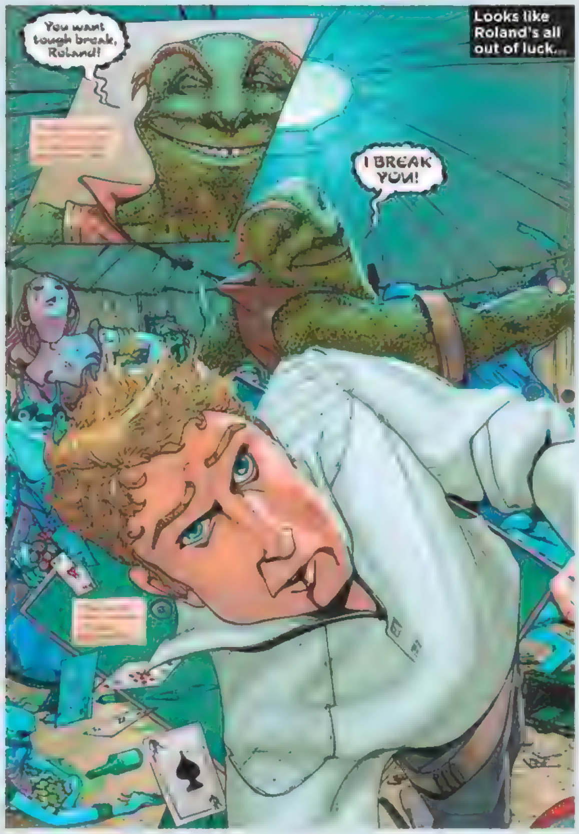
VAN HAMME TIME

Elsewhere, we have the latest episodes of two of the prolific Jean Van Hamme's ongoing series (the third is *Thorgal*), both huge in France and telling the extended, well-plotted stories of contemporary adventurers, drawn in a restrained, realistic style that's especially strong on technology.

Largo Winch is a drifter who becomes accidental billionaire owner of a string of companies; accompanied by a small gang of colourful friends, he travels the world sorting out mysteries in generally two-part tales (in the first he gets in a pickle; in the second he gets out of it). *The Three Eyes Of The Guardians Of The Tao* takes him from the south of France to Hong Kong: we get executions, girls in suspenders, a brilliantly rendered car chase, a running gag with two of Largo's helpers (one, an unlikely Asian lesbian pilot called Silky Song) competing for the same chicks, hidden island bases and failed heists. All beautifully told, and gorgeously drawn by Philippe Francq, it ends with Largo trapped in a Himalayan prison. How will he get out of this one?

Meanwhile, with Vol 18, Van Hamme closes off the Jason Bourne-influenced tale of *XIII*, a super-competent spy type with a missing memory, and a half dozen possible origin stories chasing him – not to mention a similar number of hot babes and evil masterminds both. Volumes apparently sell about 500,000 copies an album in France – few comics anywhere are mainstream hits like this one.

The initial *XIII* story arc ran from 1984 to 2007 in France, and it's a remarkable achievement – exciting, twisting, well-plotted, utterly consistent and heaving with strong characters. It ends on the beach where it began, XIII looking out to sea, and if there was a loose end that wasn't tied up this time out, I missed it. Bravo, sirs! **Matt Bielby**


You want tough break, Roland!
I BREAK YOU!

Looks like Roland's all out of luck...

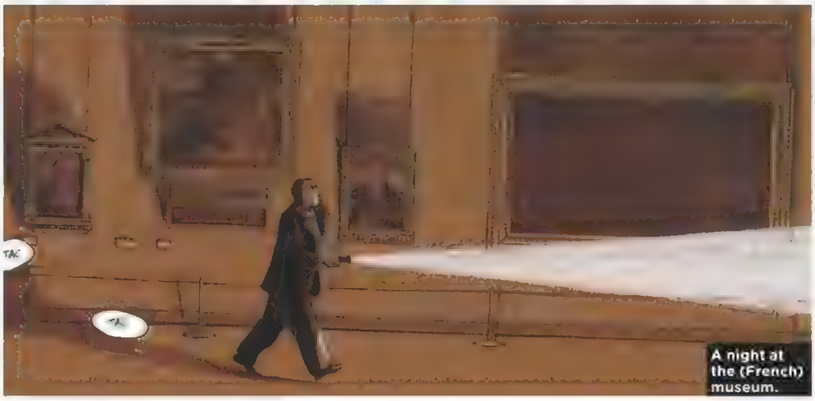
LOST VEGAS

WRITER: Jim McCann
ARTIST: Janet Lee
PUBLISHER: Image
OUT: Now
★★½

For the past year or so, Image has looked like just about the most exciting place in comics – good production values and great titles, from *The Walking Dead* to *Saga*, *Fatale* to the upcoming *Jupiter's Legacy* – but they can't all be hits, and *Lost Vegas*, despite promising aspects, doesn't quite cut it. There are intriguing elements, and it looks individual, but there's just too much confusion too. It fails to establish what's going on (are we on a space station, a starship or something else?), and our slippery *Ocean's Eleven*-style gambler-rebel hero flops in his efforts to become engaging enough for us to actually care what happens to him.

We're in a far future packed with sentient aliens – more *The Fifth Element* than *Star Wars*, it appears – where slick gambling man Roland falls foul of someone-or-other and appears to now be a slave on a vast space cruise ship (or something), aided by a handy symbiotic shape-disguise alien who helps him moonlight at the gaming tables to pay off his debts (again, or something). The Jim McCann/Janet Lee team got an Eisner Award for their steampunk fairytale *Return Of The Dapper Men*, and their blend of his Marvel background and her children's book style would appear like a merry mix, but something's not working here.

And I don't think it's the art, which (though it might take some getting used to) does its own thing with aplomb, and suits the story well. Instead, what's lacking is much of what makes a great heist tale so pleasing: clear storytelling, engaging characters, clever plans and copious twists. Most of all, Roland is such an arrogant dick I don't really care whether he gets out of his predicament or not. There are three issues still to go; the second has a lot of work to do. **Paul Marland**



A night at the (French) museum.

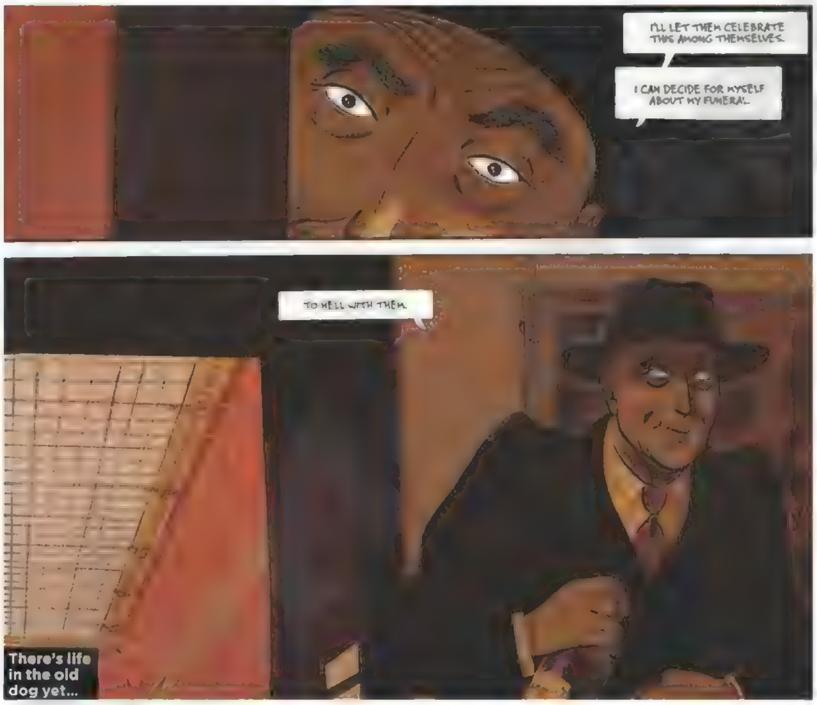
AN ENCHANTMENT (THE LOUVRE COLLECTION)

WRITER/ARTIST: Christian Durieux
PUBLISHER: NBM Publishing
OUT: Now
★★★★★

Wistful and elegiac, *An Enchantment* is the fourth and last in a series of graphic novels produced in conjunction with The Louvre in Paris, and is a book with very different intent to most of what we cover in *Comic Heroes*: there are no fights, not even a raised voice, instead it's the gentle tale of an old man – the retiring director of the museum, we discover – escaping the leaving party held in his honour to wander the dark, empty corridors alone.

There, amongst the major works of art spotlighted – pieces by Fragonard and Watteau are prominent – he comes across a mysterious young woman of uncertain provenance (lost student? Angel? A stray artist's muse?) who joins him for drinking, dancing and mild flirtation.

An Enchantment is the comic book equivalent of *Lost In Translation* or *Before Sunrise*, a dreamlike mood piece that covers issues about the museum – how it's changed over the years, primarily – but, really, exists to serve the drawing, which is muted, elegant and at times enchanting. The lasting impression it leaves is not of the museum's contents, particularly, or of the plot, but of an old man enjoying one last hurrah, his Manic Pixie Dream Girl – her eyes flashing white and pale blue against the sepia tones of much of the illustration – leading him on a barefoot chase down lonely staircases and across dark rooms. **Matt Bielby**


I'LL LET THEM CELEBRATE THIS AMONG THEMSELVES.
I CAN DECIDE FOR MYSELF ABOUT MY FUNERAL.
TO HELL WITH THEM.

There's life in the old dog yet...

DEAD SPACE: LIBERATION

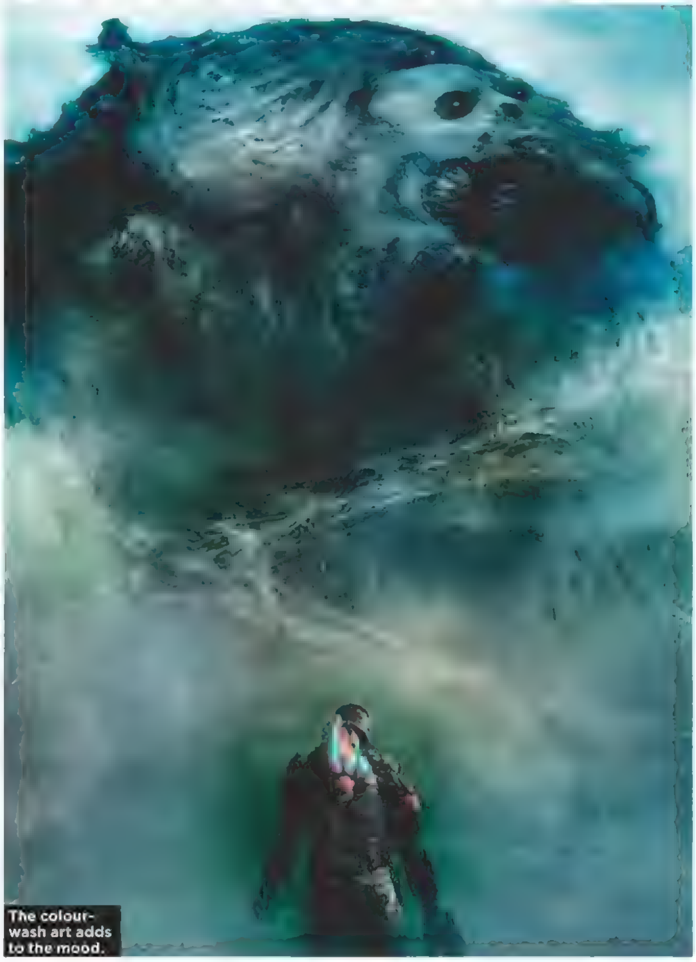
WRITER: Ian Edginton
ARTIST: Christopher Shy
PUBLISHER: Titan Books
OUT: Now
★★½

There have been two *Dead Space* graphic novels before this one – both written by Antony Johnston and with art by Ben Templesmith and, for the second, Christopher Shy. They're two very different artists, but both heavier on the mood and the horror than they are on utter clarity of storytelling.

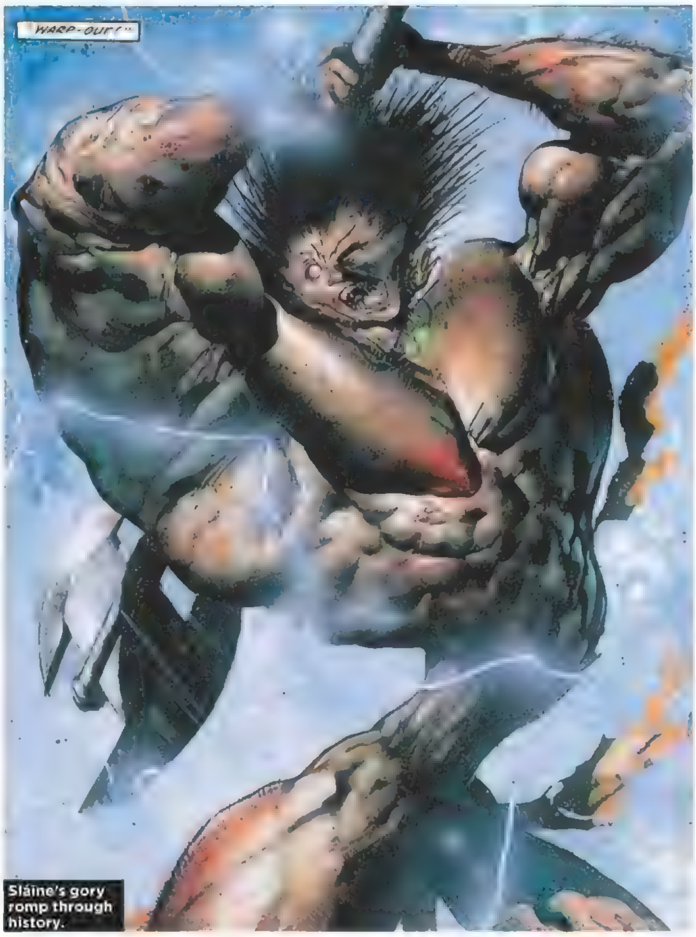
With *Dead Space: Liberation* we're thrown straight into the adventure, with no explanation as to who these people are or what's going on, aside from the fact that we're in a heavily *Alien*-influenced far future, where mostly venal people are threatened by some sort of aliens and/or monsters, and everything is coloured shades of murky brown or green. Spaceships crash, strange alien artifacts loom, bizarre mutant creatures attack occasionally as rag-tag bands of survivors wander deserted space stations: the script is pretty humourless, people constantly shouting off-the-peg tripe like "They're moving to intercept", "You're still an ass, but I love you anyway," and "That was an order, soldier. Let's go!"

Beyond the book's lax inability to give us any context at all, what both breaks and makes the thing is Christopher Shy's art. Photoshopped and painterly, it's moody and haunting and beautiful throughout. As a piece of storytelling, though, it works only patchily, with panels and even pages often baffling; this is only really speaking to those utterly in tune with the source material.

It's a real shame, as there's plenty of potential here, and style to burn – as a concept artist, Shy is some talent – but the end feeling is one of an overly simple storyline obscured by layers of stylish murk. **Paul Marland**



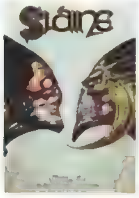
The colour-wash art adds to the mood.



Sláine's gory romp through history.

SLÁINE: THE GRAIL WAR

WRITER: Pat Mills
ARTISTS: Steve Tappin & Nick Percival
PUBLISHER: Rebellion
OUT: Now
★★★½



The highs of *Sláine* – one of Pat Mills' best-loved, most enduring strips for *2000 AD*, and that's saying something – are legendary, and include extensive runs by some of the best artists in British comics, including Mike McMahon, Glenn Fabry and especially Simon Bisley.

For the past decade or so, thanks to Clint Langley's heavily photo-manipulated work, it's been in its pomp once again – but somewhat unfairly overlooked are a whole series of stories from the '90s, when young artists in the painted Bisley mould (Dermot Power, Greg Staples and many more) tried their hand. Often painting in moody browns and blues, their work – while almost always 'good' – suffered not only in comparison to those who'd gone before, but also struggled to survive the paper and printing processes of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic of the time.

Thus it is with *The Grail War*, stories from 1997-98 when Mills had his Celtic barbarian hero travelling through time to encounter famous heroes and battles to little clear purpose – though each story in itself is witty, packed with period detail and engaging. The early Nick Percival art on 'King Of Hearts' (our hero meets William Wallace) is especially murky, but most of this volume is by Steve Tappin, who tells a morally confusing tale of the persecution of the Cathars in south-western France around 1209. Sláine fights on both sides at various points, and Tappin proves especially good at period siege tech, but is rather scattershot with his faces. It's a good read – but go for some of the earlier, more famous stories first. **Paul Marland**

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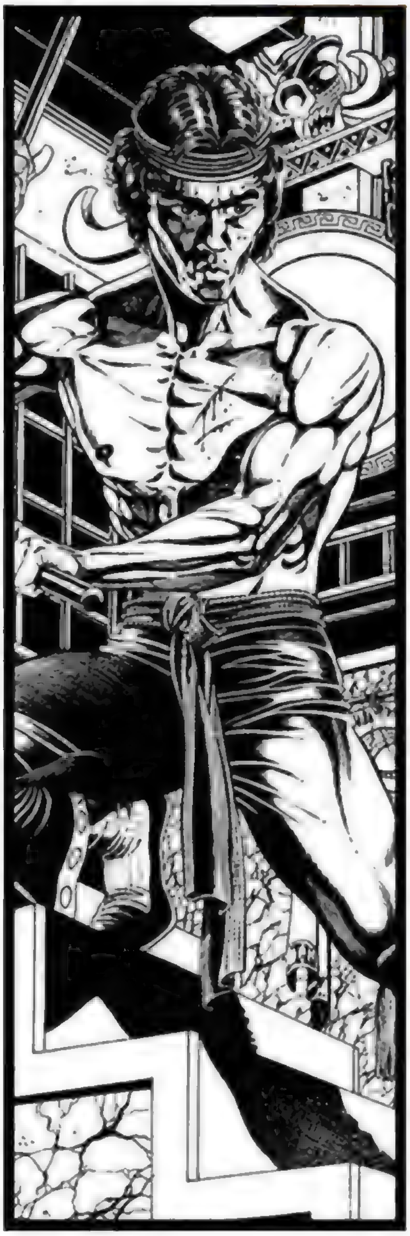
World's Finest

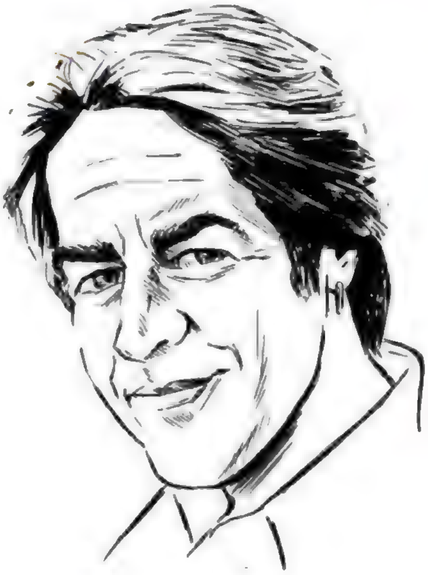
In conversation with the comic book legends...

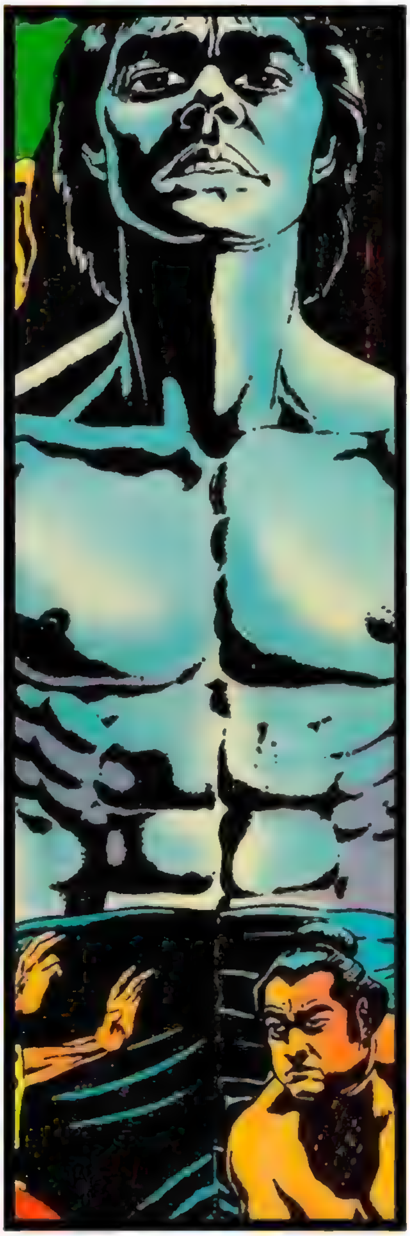
Paul Gulacy

Everybody was kung fu fighting!

Words by David Currie







> *"I never saw a Bruce Lee film prior to drawing Shang-Chi"*

The '70s was a time of great opening introductory scrawls in Marvel comics, but few were as memorable as that which graced one of the period's most unlikely hits, *Master Of Kung Fu* – or, to give it its full title, *The Hands Of Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu*.

"Call me Shang-Chi," it began, "as my father did when he raised me and molded my mind and my body in the vacuum of his Honan, China retreat. I learned many things from my father: That my name means 'The Rising and Advancing of a Spirit', that my body could be forged into a living weapon

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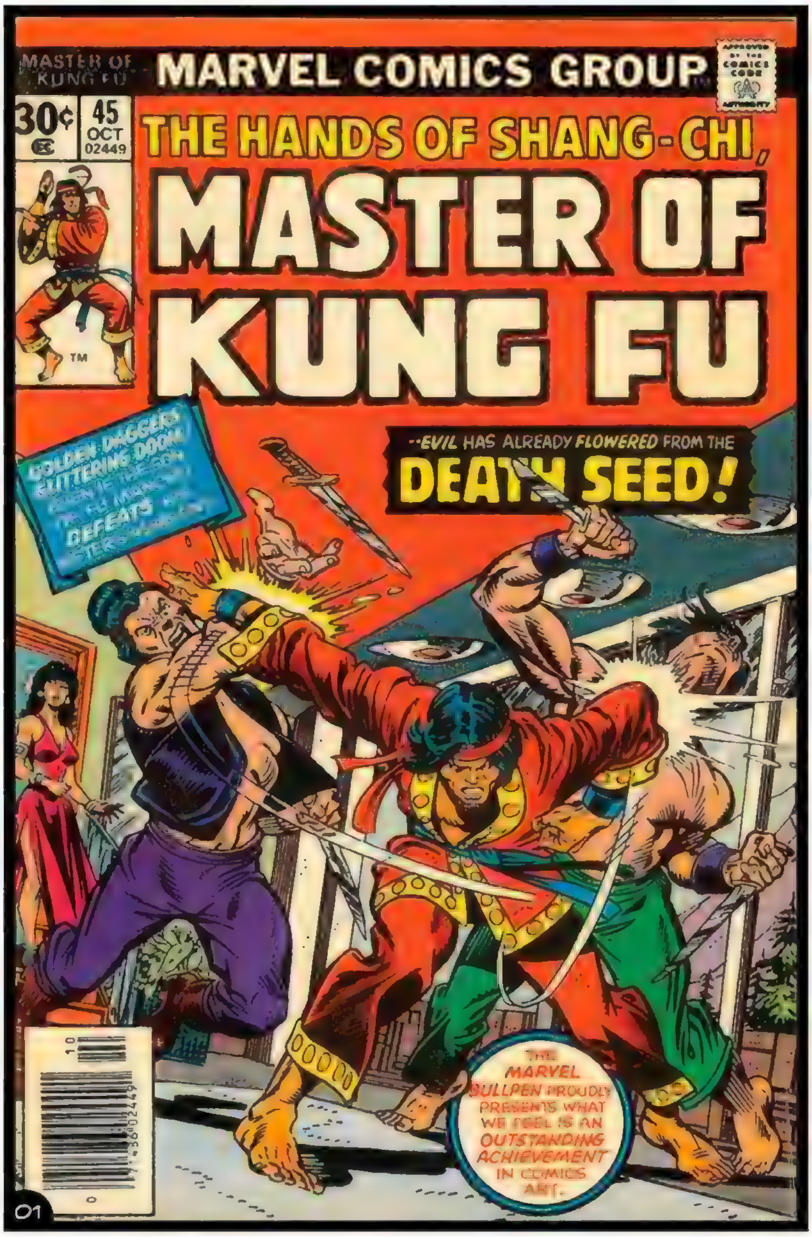
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THE HANDS OF SHANG-CHI,
MASTER OF KUNG FU
TM
GOLDEN DAGGERS GLITTERING DOOM
DEFEATS
--EVIL HAS ALREADY FLOWERED FROM THE
DEATH SEED!
THE MARVEL BULLPEN PROUDLY PRESENTS WHAT WE FEEL IS AN OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN COMICS ART.
01

01 ***The Hands Of Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu* #45, Oct 1976**

Gil Kane's action-packed cover for 'The Death Seed'.

through the discipline of kung fu, and that it might be used for the murder of a man called Dr Petrie. Since then I have learned that my father is Dr Fu Manchu, the most insidiously evil man on earth... and that to honor him would bring nothing but dishonor to the spirit of my name."

Getting shivers down your spine yet? You should, for the comic this text graced was one of the true highlights of the '70s: in the years before Frank Miller and Alan Moore reinvented what a monthly book could be with their titanic runs on *Daredevil* and *Swamp Thing*, this and the Claremont/Byrne *X-Men* were the only reason many of us still hung around the comic racks.

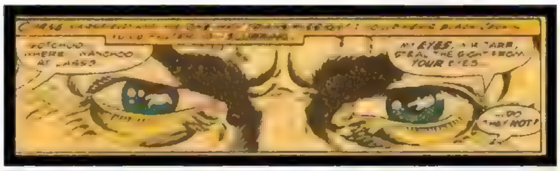
Master Of Kung Fu began in late 1973, the year of Bruce Lee's *Enter The Dragon* and the hit David Carradine TV show *Kung Fu's* second season; martial arts were everywhere, from our screens to the pop charts, and not least in the comics, a medium never shy about hitching its wagon to any passing trend. Marvel would have other kung fu stars – the more superheroic *Iron Fist*, notably – but none shone like *Master Of Kung Fu*, a book that quickly morphed from a fairly formulaic steal from the movies into something unique.

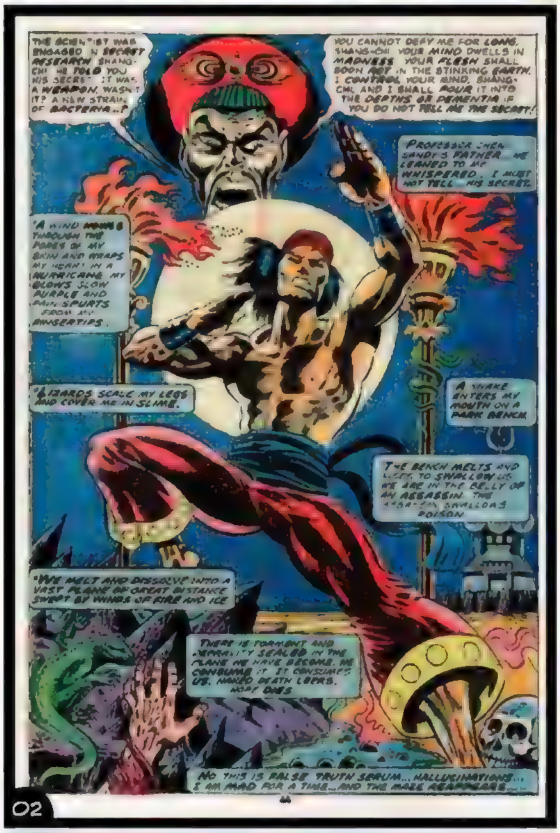
It thrust our hero – the rebellious, soulful son of '30s pulp villain Fu Manchu – into a sharply-realised, eccentrically populated world of spies, intrigue and brutal combat. It also made a star of one the great young gun artists of the day: Paul Gulacy.

In the years since *Master Of Kung Fu*, Gulacy has worked on a number of iconic characters – notably Batman, James Bond and the cast of *Star Wars* – and been something of a pioneer too, co-creating one of the first American graphic novels in *Sabre*, as well as an early creator-owned series, *Six From Sirius*, with regular partner-in-crime Doug Moench.

But it is for *Master Of Kung Fu* that he will always be remembered: his work ambitious, vibrant, highly detailed and super-sleek, packed with memorable panels and pages and bursting with vitality. Gulacy's work – *Master Of Kung Fu* was his first major professional job – developed at quite a lick, always influenced by the spectacular pyrotechnics of Jim Steranko, yet dragging in other influences too,

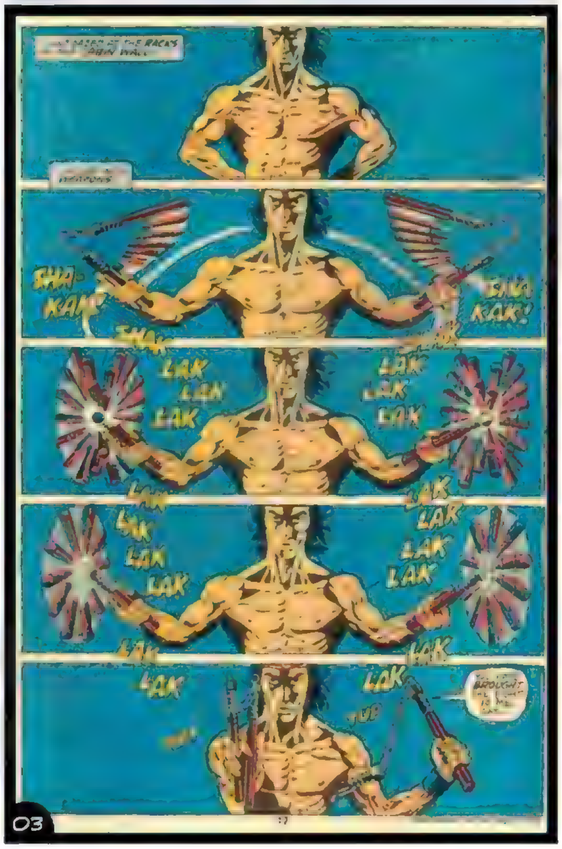
»


MY EYES, ... STEAL THE SIGHT FROM YOUR EYES
...DO THEY NOT?


THE SCIENTIST WAS ENGAGED IN SECRET RESEARCH SHANG-CHI HE TOLD YOU HIS SECRET IT WAS A WEAPON, WASN'T IT? A NEW STRAIN OF BACTERIA...?
YOU CANNOT DEFY ME FOR LONG, SHANG-CHI YOUR MIND DWELLS IN MADNESS YOUR FLESH SHALL SOON ROT IN THE STINKING EARTH. I CONTROL YOUR MIND, SHANG-CHI AND I SHALL POUR IT INTO THE DEPTHS OF DEMENTIA IF YOU DO NOT TELL ME THE SECRET!
PROFESSOR CHEN SANDY'S FATHER HE LEANED TO ME WHISPERED. I MUST NOT TELL HIS SECRET.
A WIND MOANS THROUGH THE PORES OF MY SKIN AND WRAPS MY HEART IN A HURRICANE MY BLOWS SLOW PURPLE AND PAIN SPURTS FROM MY FINGERTIPS.
LIZARDS SCALE MY LEGS AND COVER ME IN SLIME.
A SNAKE ENTERS MY MOUTH ON A PARK BENCH
THE BENCH MELTS AND LIFTS TO SWALLOW US WE ARE IN THE BELLY OF AN ASSASSIN THE ASSASSIN SWALLOWS POISON
WE MELT AND DISSOLVE INTO A VAST PLANE OF GREAT DISTANCE SWEPT BY WINDS OF FIRE AND ICE
THERE IS TORMENT AND DEPRAVITY SEALED IN THE PLANE WE HAVE BECOME. WE CONSUME IT. IT CONSUMES US. NAKED DEATH LEERS. HOPE DIES
NO THIS IS FALSE TRUTH SERUM... HALLUCINATIONS... I AM MAD FOR A TIME... AND THE MAZE REAPPEARS...
02

02 ***Giant-Size Master Of Kung Fu* #2, Dec 1974**

'The Devil Doctor's Triumph' by regular Gulacy collaborator Doug Moench.


SHA-KAK
SHA-KAK!
SHAK
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LAK
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LAK
LAK
LAK
LAK
LAK
LAK
LAK
YUP
03

03 ***The Hands Of Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu* #39, Apr 1976**

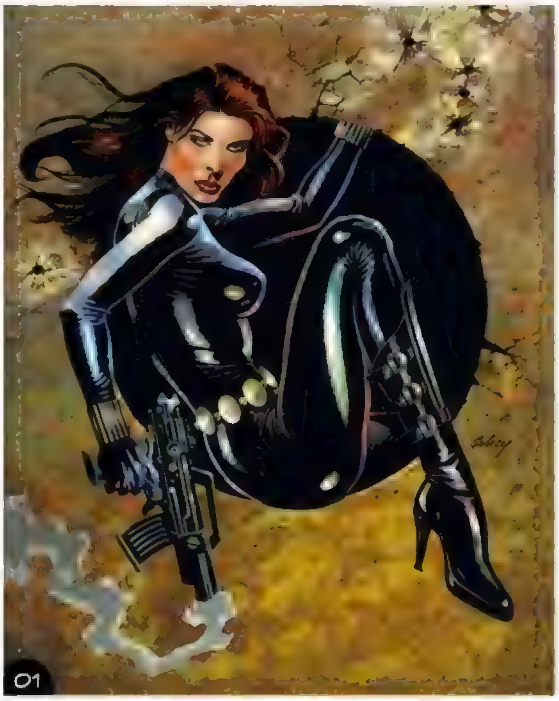
Shang-Chi: fierce of stare and pretty handy with the nunchakus.

01 & 2 **Black Widow, 1982 & 2007**

Gulacy produced a collection of Black Widow images in the early '80s, including this hyper-detailed pencil drawing [02]; he returned to the auburn-haired femme fatale in 2007, with the more sexy, stylised version, below [01].

03 **Batman #394, Apr 1986**

Gulacy's initial run on the Caped Crusader was his foot-in-the-door at DC. During the '90s, he spent most of his time working on *Batman*.



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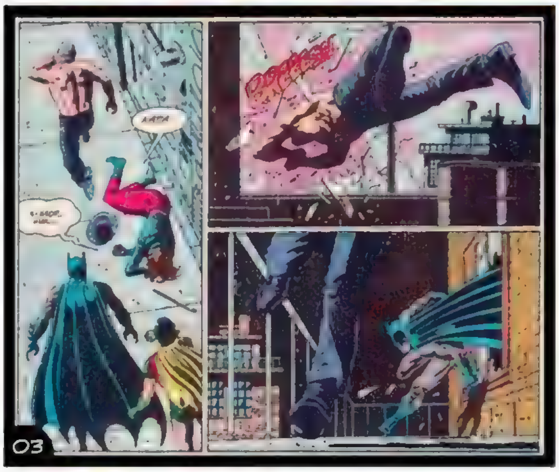


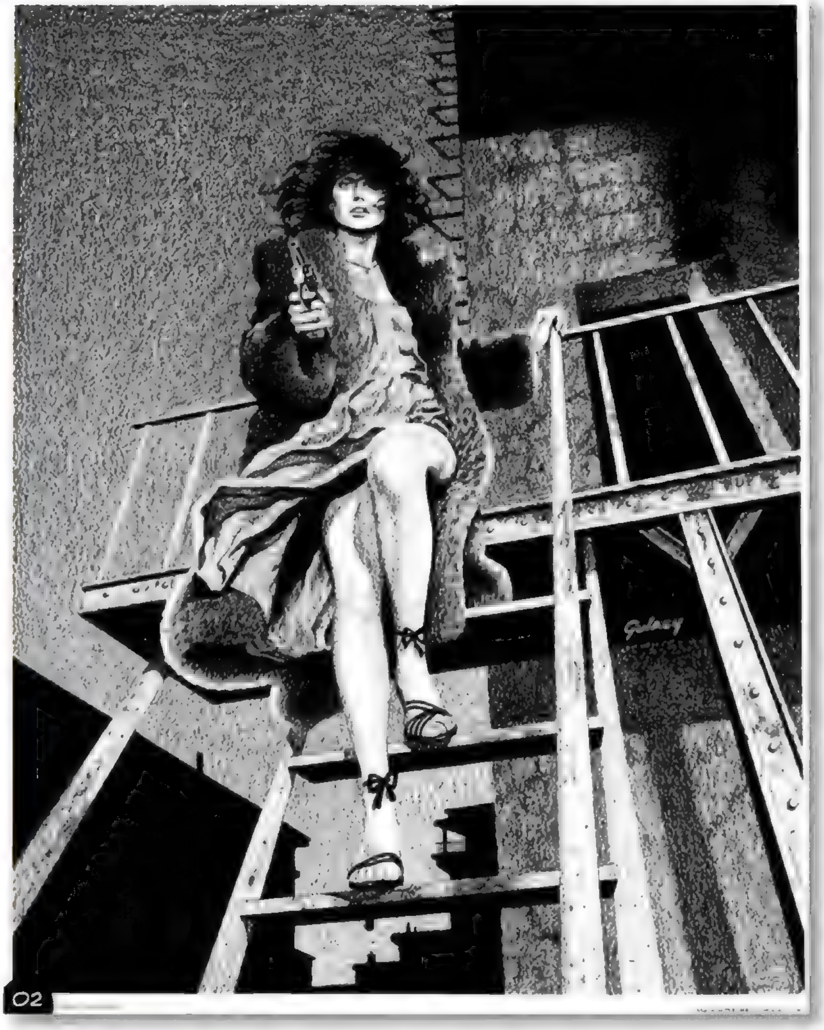
03

> *“I'd put Batman right up there with Shang-Chi”*

notably the movies, from which he developed numerous storytelling techniques, and gleefully stole faces for his cast. His Chi was heaving with Bruce Lee; sidekick Clive Reston combined elements of Basil Rathbone and a young Sean Connery; and everyone from David Niven to Marlene Dietrich would show up at one point or another.

Though a Gulacy-driven *Master Of Kung Fu* enjoyed a brief revival some 10 years back, and a more superheroic take on Shang-Chi is enjoying a higher profile right now than he has for many years, the artist himself is perhaps better known for the acclaimed *Star Wars: Crimson Empire* series of books than superspies and martial artists these days.

But not here at *Comic Heroes*. We wanted to take him back to a different time, when those cats really were fast as lightning...



02

Comic Heroes: To begin with, let's spin right back to the early years. What are your childhood memories of '50s America?

Paul Gulacy: I had a wonderful time growing up with my sister, Janet, outside Youngstown, Ohio – a once prosperous steel mining city. We lived in what you might call the country suburbs. I was a boy scout, and my best friend's family owned cattle and a herd of horses; we rode all the time. Their house overlooked a lake where we fished, swam and water-skied with our mates. We played Cowboys and Indians and Tarzan in the forest.

My dad worked for a Jewish bakery, and my mom worked part-time at a pharmacy. It was a great childhood, and I wouldn't change a thing about it. I might add that Youngstown takes pride in being the home town of the actual Warner brothers – all four of them.

CH: And during all this, you drew...?

PG: I started when I was six years old. I had a Roy Rogers toy, along with his horse Trigger, and one day I had them sitting on the kitchen table and asked my mother to hand me a sheet of paper and a pencil. I slowly began to outline the figures, and that was it. I was drawing.

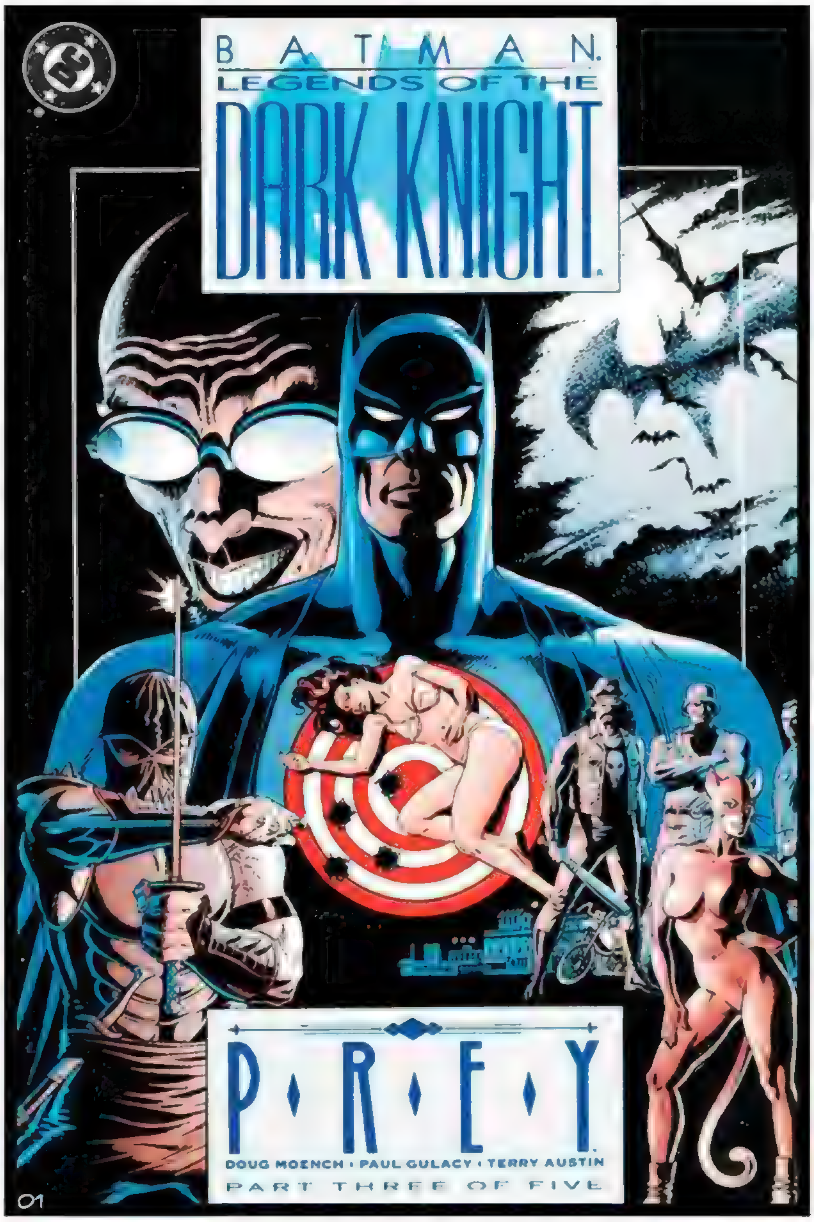
CH: When were you first introduced to the world of comics?

PG: When my dad and I would pick up mom from her job at that pharmacy. They had the classic revolving comic book spinner rack and I honed in on it. It wasn't Marvel comics I read at first. I liked *Turok: Son Of Stone*, *Tarzan Of The Apes*, *Dennis The Menace*, *Twilight Zone* comics and, of course, my main man – *Sgt Rock*. Joe Kubert was my hero. I also loved *Enemy Ace*, because I was intrigued by World War 1 flying aces, and I used to build the model planes.

I think that I wasn't ready for Marvel books at that time. I didn't get the covers, with the big foreshortened hands coming out at you. The whole Kirby thing. But it didn't take long before I really got into it. Of course, later on – and being a huge James Bond fan – I was particularly knocked out by Jim Steranko's *S.H.I.E.L.D* books. For me, that changed everything.

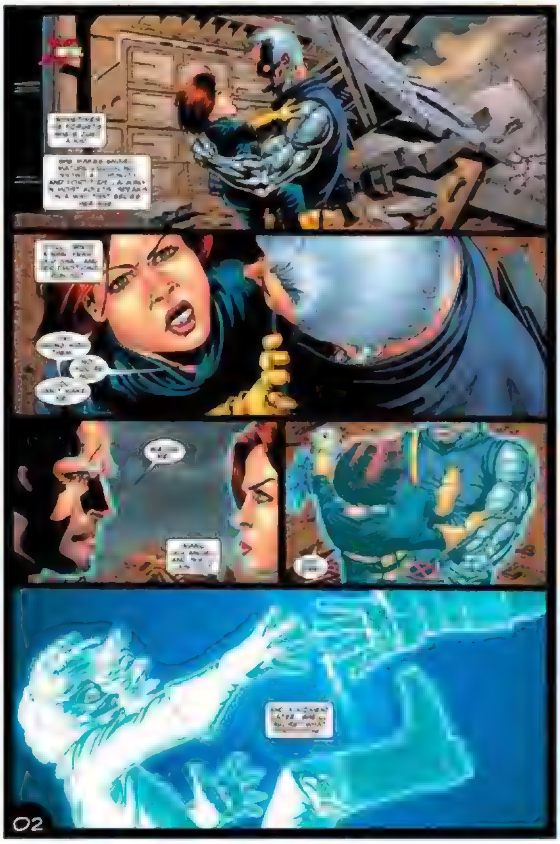
CH: So, after reading Steranko's *S.H.I.E.L.D*, your sights were set on a career as a comic artist. What led to this becoming a reality?

PG: I was an art student in Pittsburgh, with one more year to go before graduation, when I met a girl on a bus one day who was heading to my hometown. We began



01 ***Legends of the Dark Knight*, 1990**
An early tale from this varied series by Gulacy and Moench

02 ***Cable*, 2009**
Recent Gulacy work includes a run on the X-Men's far-future cyborg



> *“To this day, when I run into Stan, he just lights up”*

chatting, and at one point she asked me what I wanted to do with my career, and I mentioned that I might enter the comic book field. She tells me that her boyfriend is an artist for Marvel, and that he lives in Youngstown. She had to explain the entire world of freelancing to me because I didn't have a clue. But the boyfriend turned out to be Val Mayerik [soon to become known for *Man-Thing* and *Howard The Duck*], and he knew Dan Atkins [from an earlier generation of artists, best known for work on Wally Wood's *THUNDER Agents* at Warren, and plenty of early Marvels] who was also local.

Now, I knew Dan's name from his work on *Doctor Strange* and, of course, from his inking of Jim Steranko for *S.H.I.E.L.D.* Through Dan I met another artist, and this time it's P Craig Russell [later of *Killraven* and *Sandman* fame]. Turns out all of us guys were living within a 40-mile radius of each other!

CH: An amazing coincidence!

PG: One day Adkins suggested that I come up with a six-page short story with no dialogue; his plan was to submit it to the Marvel editor at the time, Roy Thomas. So I drew this crazy story after a wild party one night, and didn't really expect to hear back that quickly. But lo and behold, one day I'm mowing my parents' lawn, and I spot my dad waving his arms all over the place. I cut the engine and ask 'What's up?' He yells back, 'It's Roy Thomas from Marvel Comics in New York!'

Well, I think I broke a speed record in getting to that phone! Roy told me they liked what they saw in my work and hired me to work on *Morbius: The Living Vampire*. At this point, I'm still attending art classes by day and working on *Morbius* in the evenings. I was 21 years old at the time.

CH: And at some point around here, though, you must surely have rocked up at Marvel's doors proper?

PG: Oh, I often visited the Marvel offices in New York, and the halls were crackling with energy and excitement. Regularly I'd see Stan Lee, John Romita, John Verpoorten and a whole bunch of production people. Once in a while other 'new' artists would also visit – Walt Simonson, Jim Starlin, Howard Chaykin, Al Milgrom. We were the new kids on the block.

Bear in mind that some of these guys were living in the city, and some were, like me, freelancing across the country. For me it was this crazy gig, hanging out with my old friends, going to clubs and parties, chasing girls and getting high!

I never met Jack Kirby back then, but Stan was always friendly. To this day, when I run into him, he just lights up. You can see the joy in his face because I'm bringing back those old memories – the good old days. Stan always gives me a warm handshake and he looks you right in the eye with that famous grin of his.

CH: You will, of course, be forever remembered for your groundbreaking work on *Master Of Kung Fu*. We imagine you lost yourself in the many kung fu movies of the time when drawing the series – but how did the initial assignment come your way?

PG: *Master Of Kung Fu* just fell into my lap when Steve Engelhart and Jim Starlin – the original creative team – decided to pull the ripcord on the title after only three issues. This came in another phone call from Roy, and it was his decision. I never saw a Bruce Lee film prior to drawing *Shang-Chi*. The TV show with David Carradine I did see – but Bruce came into my life a year after I was on the series.

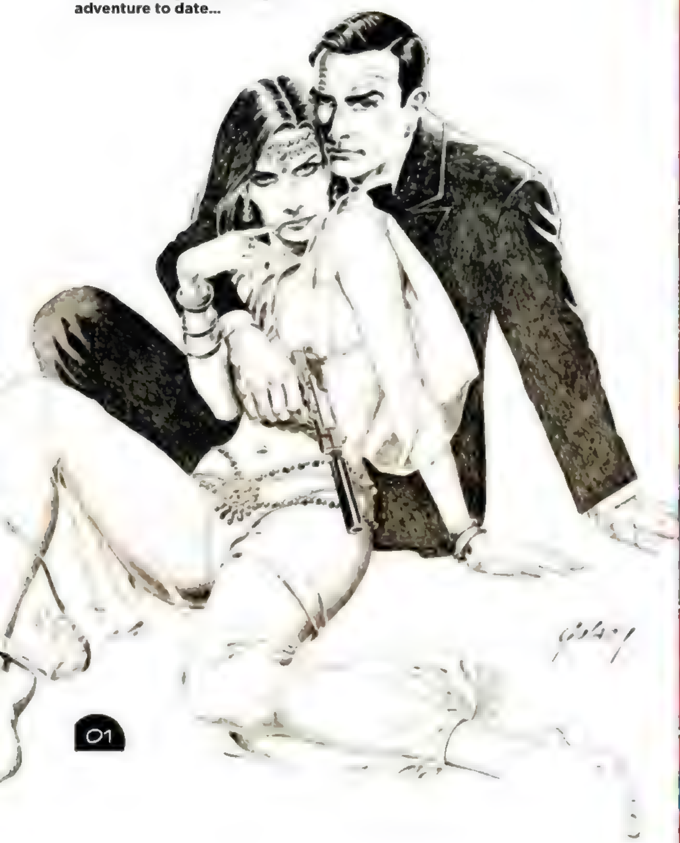
For inspiration, I used to take a tape recorder to a drive-in theatre that was playing kung fu films and tape the fight scenes. Just the sound. Then I played it back the next day when I was trying to come up with ideas for fight

01& 2 ***James Bond 007: Serpent's Tooth***

These Gulacy Bond books were released in the early '90s and feature what was possibly the undercover agent's strangest adventure to date...

03 ***Sci-Spy: The Complete Series*, Dec 2010**

James-Bond-meets-Star-Wars in this fairly recent Doug Moench collaboration for Image Comics.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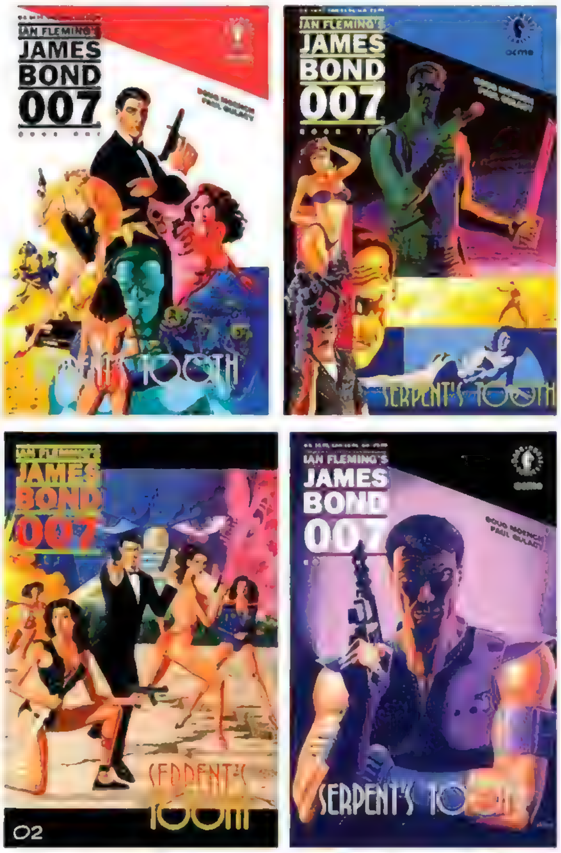
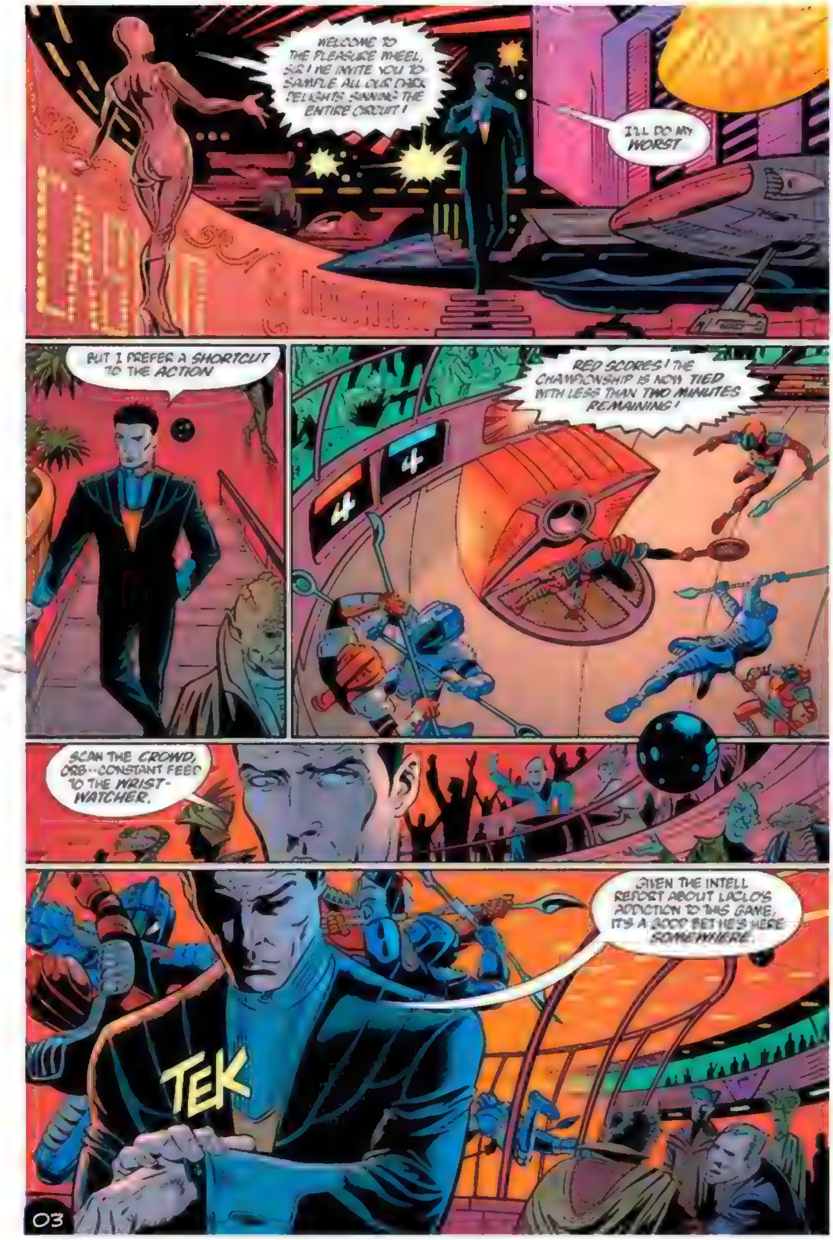

IAN FLEMING'S
JAMES BOND 007
SERPENT'S TOOTH
02


WELCOME TO THE PLEASURE WHEEL, SIR! WE INVITE YOU TO SAMPLE ALL OUR DARK DELIGHTS SPINNING THE ENTIRE CIRCUIT!
I'LL DO MY WORST.
BUT I PREFER A SHORTCUT TO THE ACTION
RED SCORES! THE CHAMPIONSHIP IS NOW TIED WITH LESS THAN TWO MINUTES REMAINING!
4
4
SCAN THE CROWD, ORB--CONSTANT FEED TO THE WRIST-WATCHER.
GIVEN THE INTELL REPORT ABOUT LACLO'S ADDICTION TO THIS GAME, IT'S A GOOD BET HE'S HERE SOMEWHERE.
TEK
03

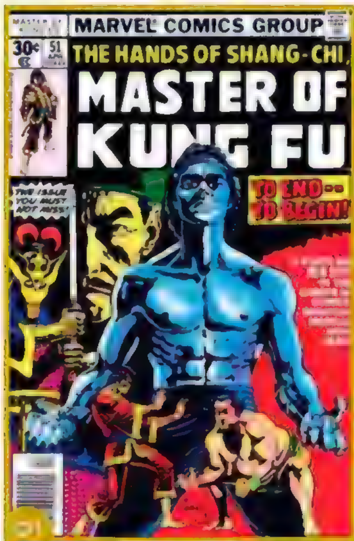
sequences. I'd play it and say to myself, 'Oh yeah! That was that scene where the guy flips backwards onto the table then jumps into the air with a sword at the two guys attacking.'

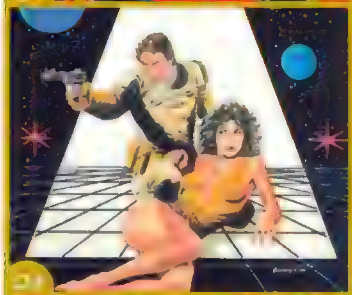
Eventually I got around to seeing *Enter The Dragon*, and that changed everything. I got hold of a 35mm print of the actual film and photographed almost the entire movie, freeze-framing scenes with a camera set on a tripod. There was no videotape, no DVD back in those days. You had to wing it. I managed to watch that movie a total of 47 times! I counted.

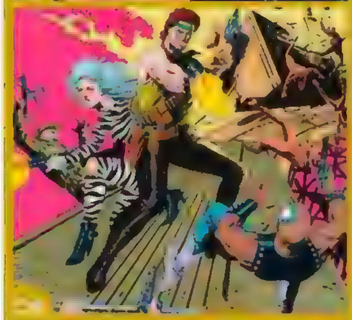
CH: Did writer Doug Moench provide you with full scripts for the series?
PG: Doug provided scripts of the kind you just don't see these days. He never broke panels down. He never numbered the scenes like how they are today. Panel one, we have this happening; panel two we see this etc. None of that. Doug's scripts were big chunks of paragraphs that I had to read and then figure out. I look back and wonder, how the hell did I work like that? Especially with *Master Of Kung Fu* – which was a comic off the hook, visually.

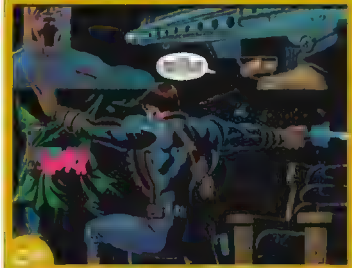
CH: I guess this method of working helped your art to develop so rapidly during the series, though, both in execution and in your experimental approaches to layout and storytelling. Was it a good working relationship with Doug?
PG: Doug and I butted heads on many occasions, but we always resolved things. He gave me free reign. It's hard to get angry with Doug, because he's so laid back. We always discussed the storyline over the phone. He had his ideas and I had mine; it was like a well-oiled machine.

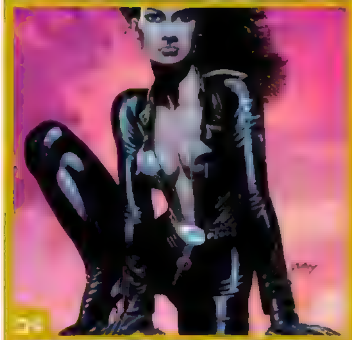
CH: How did you work? You rarely got to ink yourself...?
PG: I would have liked to have inked my own pencils more during the series, but I honestly was so close to running late with pencils that there was just no time. The

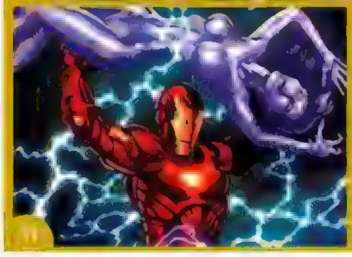












Paul Gulacy | Major Works

01 MASTER OF KUNG FU | 1974-1977; 2002-03
Total knock-out from start to finish, this kung fu spy-fi thriller by Doug Moench and Gulacy was one of the great comics of the '70s; later revived to minor effect under the Marvel Max imprint.

02 SABRE: SLOW FADE OF AN ENDANGERED SPECIES | 1978
Ambitious, sentimental, silly, pretentious, kinda amazing proto-graphic novel, with a swashbuckling black hero – Jimi Hendrix dressed as a pirate! – in a knackered post-apocalyptic future of animal/human hybrids and plenty of sex.

03 SIX FROM SIRIUS | 1984-86
Government agents on a mission to prevent interplanetary war in this *Blake's 7*-meets-007 Moench/Gulacy space opera romp for Marvel's Epic line; beautiful, tight, slightly stiff painted art made it feel very special at the time; a second miniseries followed.

04 BATMAN | 1986-2001
Gulacy has been involved with numerous Bat-oriented miniseries – one even saw him fight the movie Predator – over the years, usually written by Moench; his art fits this sleek, dark world unusually well.

05 SLASH MARAUD | 1987-88
Clint Eastwood's Man with No Name stars in a *Killraven* aliens-have-won scenario for this neat, action-packed DC Moench/Gulacy mini; you can't help feeling it could do with just a tad more originality, however.

06 JAMES BOND 007: SERPENT'S TOOTH | 1992-93
Huge 007 fans, the Moench/Gulacy team finally got their crack at Bond himself for this three-issue Dark Horse miniseries; sadly, their earlier *Master Of Kung Fu* take on the idea had worked much better, and a too-sci-fi villain (who's half-man/half-lizard – and has pet dinos!) doesn't help.

07 STAR WARS: CRIMSON EMPIRE | 1998-2012
The tale of former Imperian Guardsman Kir Kanos (one of those red-cloaked guys who hung around the Emperor in *Return Of The Jedi*) turned bounty hunter in the post-Empire *Star Wars* landscape spans three miniseries and more than a decade; it's well worth grabbing in its collected edition.

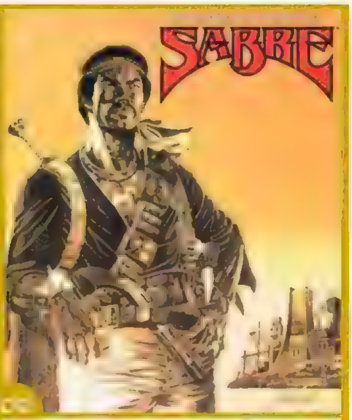
08 SCI-SPY | 2002
Basically, an elegant '60s 007 in space from Moench and Gulacy, with plenty of sex kittens and spaceships and aliens; over-the-top and not hugely likeable.

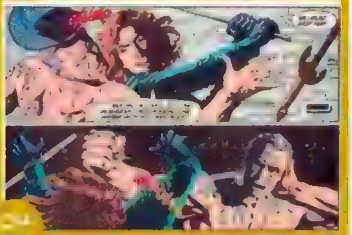
09 RELOAD | 2003
Gulacy's art fit this gun-happy Warren Ellis Wildstorm three-part miniseries perfectly: a hot female assassin kills the president and then goes after the rest of the establishment too; can our Secret Service hero take her down?

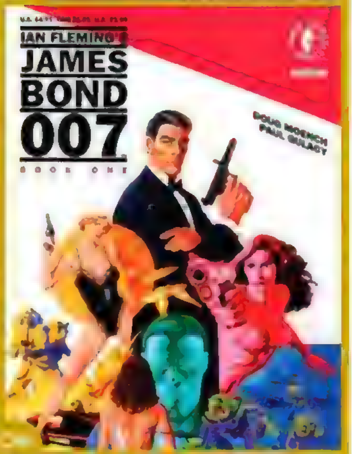
10 CATWOMAN | 2004-2005
Gulacy drew a few Ed Brubaker issues; as with Marvel's Black Widow, who he's also had a stab at, his style certainly fits a slinky, black-clad female adventurer.

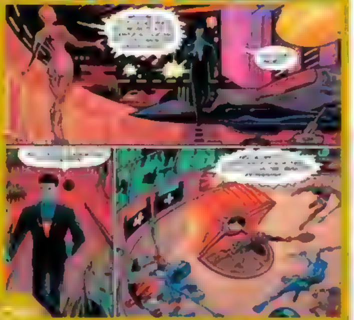
11 TRUE BELIEVERS | 2008
A rare Gulacy Marvel outing with a new writer – Cary '*Superboy*' Bates – this under-the-radar mini featured an all-new team of ex-S.H.I.E.L.D types investigating the grubby, behind-the-scenes corners of the Marvel U.

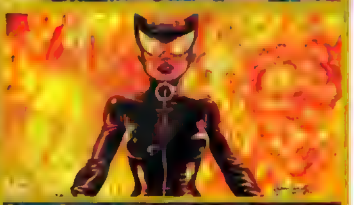
12 TIME BOMB 2010
Secret cities beneath modern Berlin? Time travel? Unstoppable bio-weapons? Oodles of dead Nazis? This collaboration with Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Gray has it all; it's one of Gulacy's best thrill-rides in years.

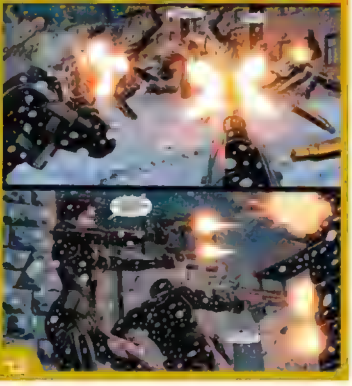


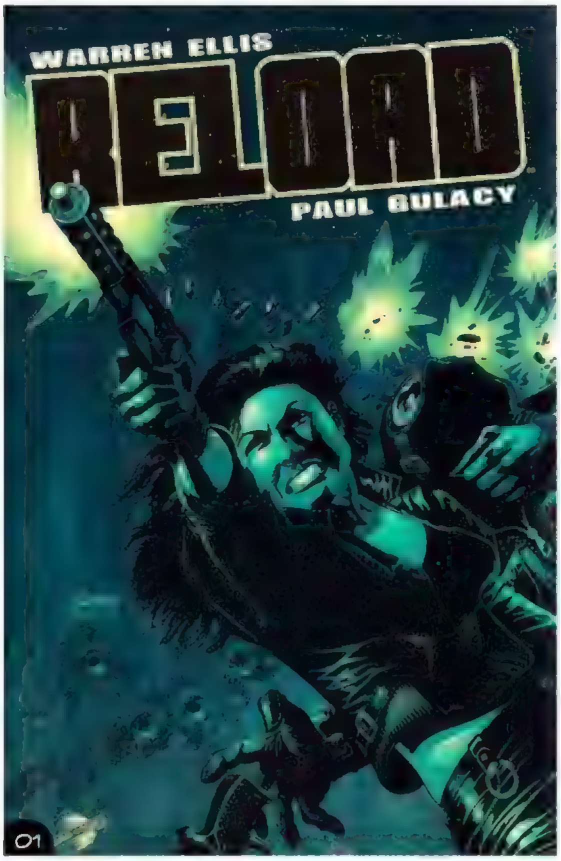






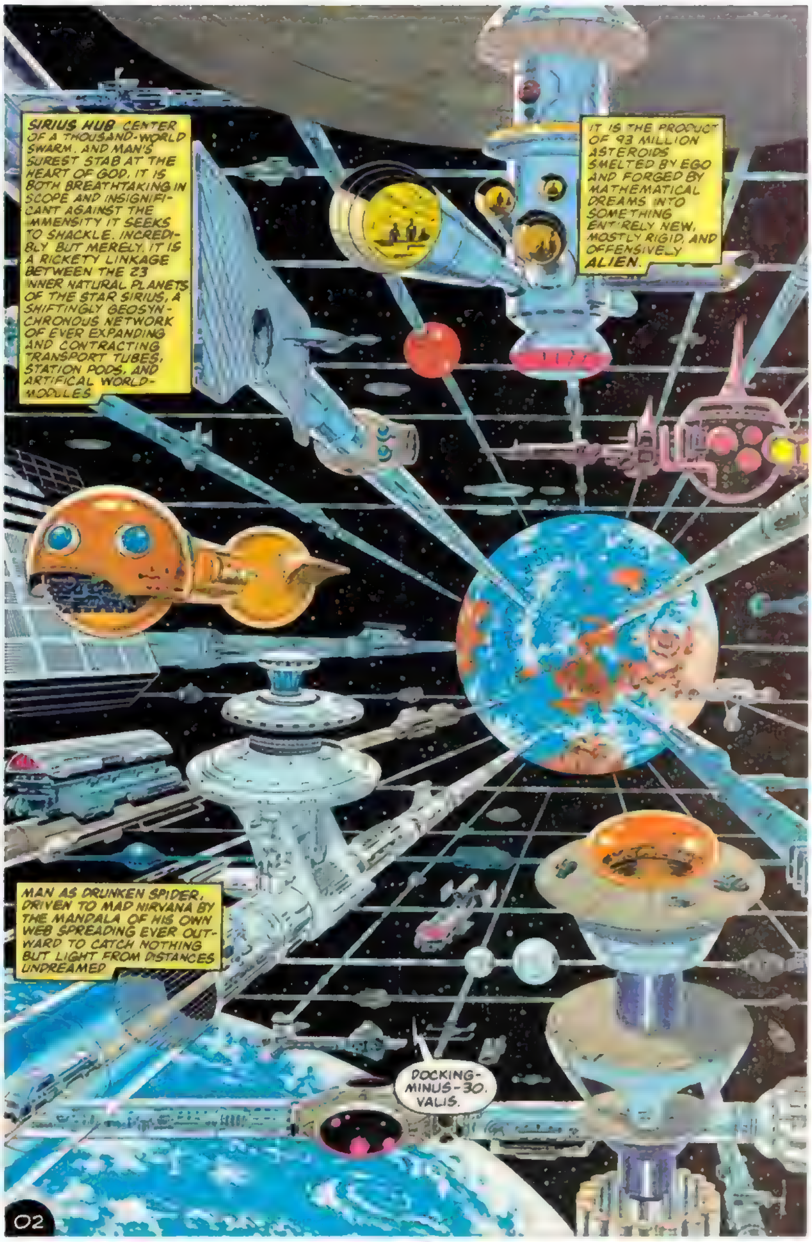





WARREN ELLIS
RELOAD
PAUL GULACY

01 ***Reload #2*, Apr 2003**

DC's action-packed US conspiracy thriller was drawn by Gulacy and written by *Planetary* scribe Warren Ellis.


SIRIUS HUB CENTER OF A THOUSAND-WORLD SWARM. AND MAN'S SUREST STAB AT THE HEART OF GOD. IT IS BOTH BREATHTAKING IN SCOPE AND INSIGNIFICANT AGAINST THE IMMENSITY IT SEEKS TO SHACKLE. INCREDIBLY BUT MERELY. IT IS A RICKETY LINKAGE BETWEEN THE 23 INNER NATURAL PLANETS OF THE STAR SIRIUS, A SHIFTINGLY GEOSYNCHRONOUS NETWORK OF EVER EXPANDING AND CONTRACTING TRANSPORT TUBES, STATION PODS, AND ARTIFICAL WORLD-MODULES
IT IS THE PRODUCT OF 93 MILLION ASTEROIDS SMELTED BY EGO AND FORGED BY MATHEMATICAL DREAMS INTO SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW, MOSTLY RIGID, AND OFFENSIVELY ALIEN.
MAN AS DRUNKEN SPIDER, DRIVEN TO MAD NIRVANA BY THE MANDALA OF HIS OWN WEB SPREADING EVER OUTWARD TO CATCH NOTHING BUT LIGHT FROM DISTANCES UNDREAMED
DOCKING-MINUS-30. VALIS.

02 ***Six From Sirius*, Jul-Oct 1984**

Intergalactic agents in outer space were the focus of this much-loved miniseries. (There was a sequel the following year.)

> *“Six From Sirius is still one of my favourite series”*

pencils I produced were super-tight, though, with all the blacks filled in.

When I did get a chance to ink myself, they would have to jam in a filler issue to make that work – but it was my goal to show the audience what my work would look like if I did the entire job myself. I felt that was important before I bailed out from the series. Thing is, for a period of time, I felt I was suffering from bad inking on the title. The colouring was nothing to jump up and down about either. Every month was like a crap shoot, and you had to take the good with the bad.

Overall, though, it was a glorious time. Doug and I never anticipated what this series would become, and what an influence and inspiration it came to be – not only in the comic book world, but also some of today's current popular writers and artists, filmmakers, and aspiring martial artists as well.

CH: So how fast are you as an artist? How many pages can you pencil and ink a day, say?

PG: I can still do three-quarters of a page a day, pencils and inks; that takes me around six hours. Probably that hasn't changed since the days when I was working on *Master Of Kung Fu*. For covers, generally I'll submit a rough sketch and when it gets the thumbs up I jump right into it, doing the best I can as quickly as I can.

CH: Did you get to retain any of your original art from the series back then?

PG: All the *Master Of Kung Fu* pages were returned to me at the time, but today I don't have a single one! I sold it all years ago, and for very little by today's prices, thinking it had no value. All of these accolades came way after Doug and I left the book, you see, and I never knew the original sales figures. Now you can't find the original art pages anywhere. Once in a blue moon one page may emerge for sale on the market, and I do know a popular TV writer in Hollywood who has some.

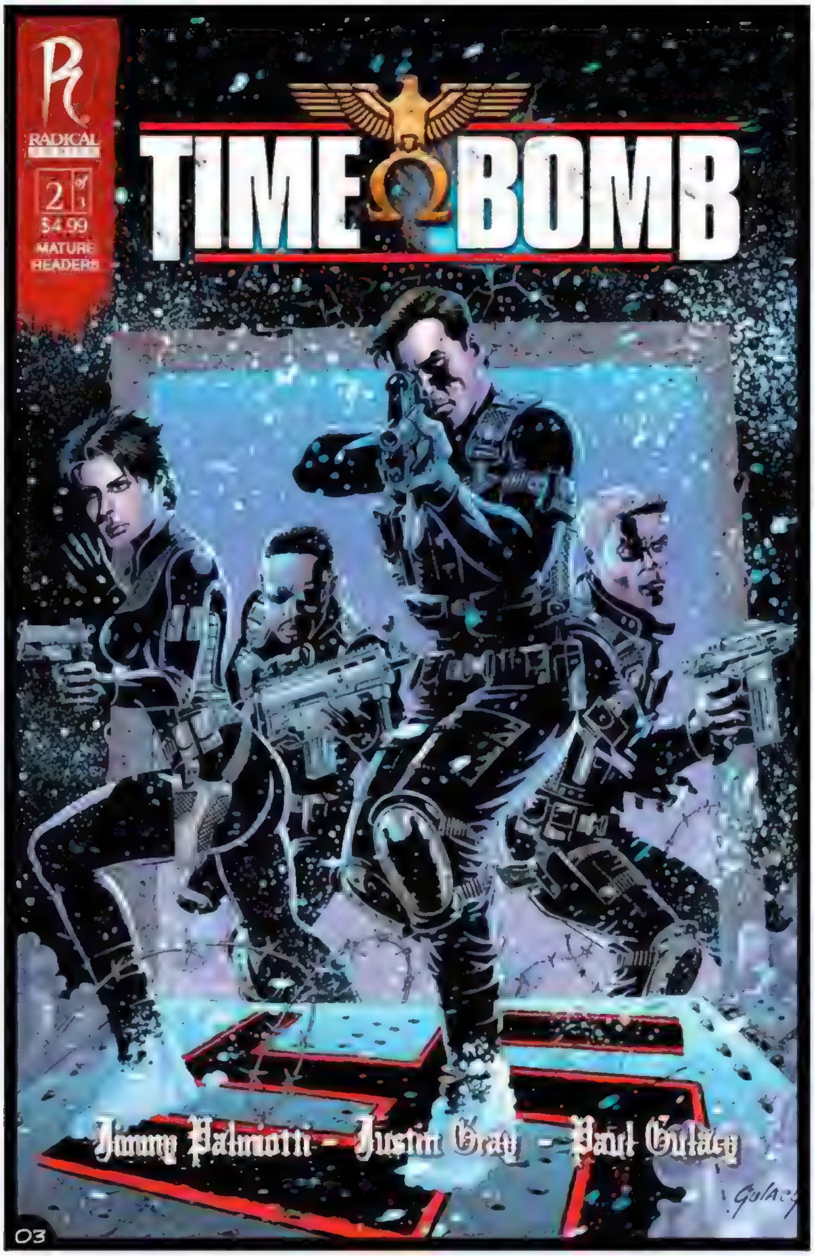
CH: Of course, it wasn't only in the 1970s that you were involved with *Master Of Kung Fu*. How did the 2002 reunion series you did with Doug for the Marvel Max line come about?

PG: That was all Marvel editor Axel Alonso's idea. He told me that if he was ever in a position to bring the title back, it was at the top of his list – and he actually made it happen. I thought it was good enough, and the reviews were solid. It was fun to return to Shang-Chi. It was like seeing old friends again after so many years.

CH: So you're happy that most fans still consider *Master Of Kung Fu* to be your greatest work then?

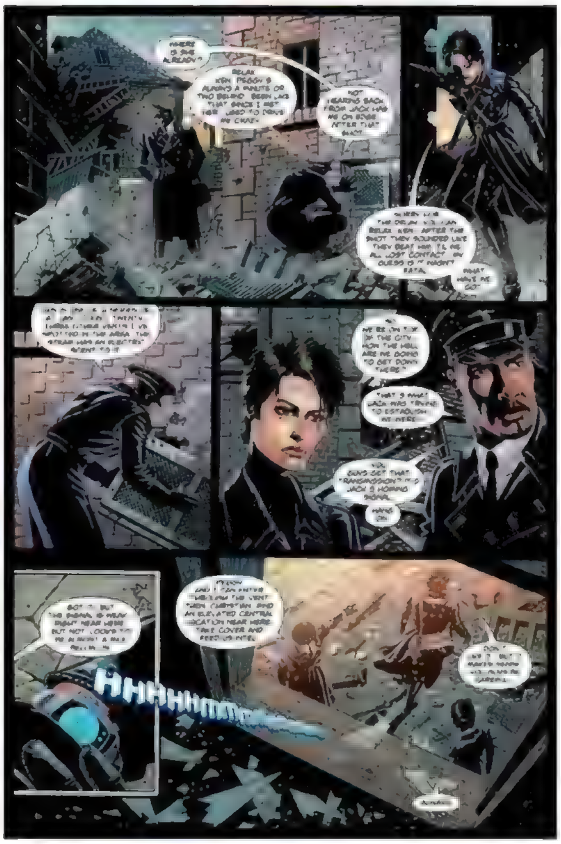
PG: I wear it like a badge of honour! I will take this to the grave. But, honestly, I haven't seen much of what other folks have done with Shang-Chi in the years that followed. I'm afraid to look. Anything good?

That all said, I'd personally put Batman right up there on an equal footing with Shang Chi in terms of importance to my career. I've actually produced more *Batman* pages than *Master Of Kung Fu*, and I definitely feel a kinship with the character; I certainly get more Batman requests for sketches at comic conventions. As for me, I really consider the highlight of my career to be surviving in one piece!



03 ***Time Bomb #2,*** **Sep 2010**

Gulacy's stunning artwork helped make Palmiotti and Gray's tale – time-travelling troops take on the Nazis – a solid hit.



> *❝ Rename Fu Manchu in all issues as the Yellow Claw ❞*

CH: We still await a *Master Of Kung Fu* reprint, of course...
PG: *Master Of Kung Fu* has never been collected or reprinted in any form by Marvel; it's not really been seen since its original publication in the '70s. This, they say, is due to the fact that it uses characters from Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories – licensed from his estate by Marvel at the time.

It's a real shame that modern economics and legal issues are preventing the collection of this worthy series, so here's a suggestion to the House of Ideas: rename Fu Manchu in all issues as the Yellow Claw, an existing Marvel character that originates from the company's Timely Comics days, and you got a done deal! After all, it worked for Marvel UK with *Apeslayer*! [Marvel UK's renamed and partly redrawn reprint of *Killraven*, pressed into service when the British *Planet Of The Apes* weekly began to run out of *Ape*-related strip!]

CH: Moving on, why did you jump from Marvel to Warren in the late '70s?
PG: By that time I'd made my move to New York. Shortly prior to that, however, I'd taken my sister's bedroom at my parent's home – she'd got married and moved out – and turned it into a studio to save money. I focused on putting together a portfolio of painting samples, because that was now my goal – to be a paperback cover artist.

The *Creepy* and *Eerie* gigs just fell in my lap. I had a relationship with editor Louise Simonson, going back to the Marvel days, and she wanted to know if I would be interested in doing some stories for Warren Publishing. I never considered working for Warren before, but I bought their books and thought it could be fun. It was a little intimidating, though, considering the level of talent they had working for them.

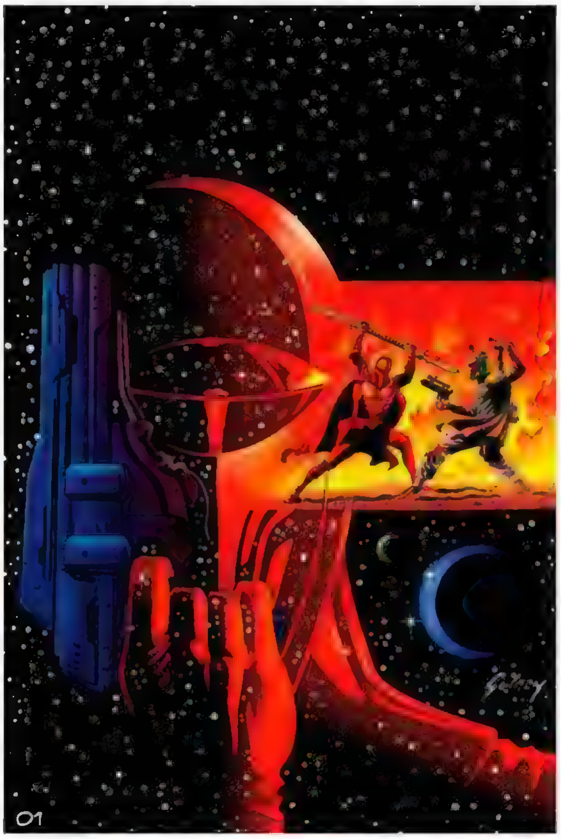
Both strips I did, *Blood On Black Satin* and *Trespasser*, were done in a wash of black watercolour and no inks. Meanwhile, at Marvel, I was doing stories for its Epic Comics imprint – *Six From Sirius* comes to mind, which ran to two miniseries. I also sneaked in a couple of painted covers.

CH: Tell us about *Six From Sirus*. Many people remember it very well...
PG: *Six From Sirius* was totally a 50-50 concept with Doug Moench. We both put that together, and it's still one of my favourite series. Movie Producer Gale Ann Hurd was interested in making it into a motion picture a few years back, and I think it still has legs. It's the same with the Vertigo miniseries *Sci-Spy* – think James Bond in space – which Gale's ex-husband, James Cameron, looked very closely at. But, eventually, no dice. Doug and I have been there, done that with these movie projects, so we don't sweat it. We know that somebody needs to raise $200 million to get one of these made!

CH: Any particular reason why your more personal series seem to have been science fiction, rather than superhero, based...?
PG: True, but I can't say if one genre trumps the other, or even that I prefer drawing one to the other. Doug and I did plenty of both, but it's true that Doug has done more superhero stories than I have – including creating a fair few of them himself.

THE WORLD'S FIRST GRAPHIC NOVEL?

In 1978, appearing just a few months before Will Eisner's *A Contract With God* – the work commonly regarded as the world's (or, at least, America's) first graphic novel – came something called *Sabre: Slow Fade Of An Endangered Species.*



> **“All the art in Sabre is me, free and clear”**

Penned by Don McGregor (wordy writer of the *Black Panther* strip in *Jungle Action* and Marvel's *Killraven*) and drawn by Gulacy, it was published outside the comic book mainstream and aimed at the fledgling direct sales market. *Sabre* contained a complete narrative in a single package with a fairly substantial price tag ($6 was a lot of bucks in 1978!), and though it described itself as a 'comic novel', it sure looks like a graphic novel to us – albeit a rather short one.

CH: *Sabre* was a very ambitious work for its time, but how exactly did it come about?

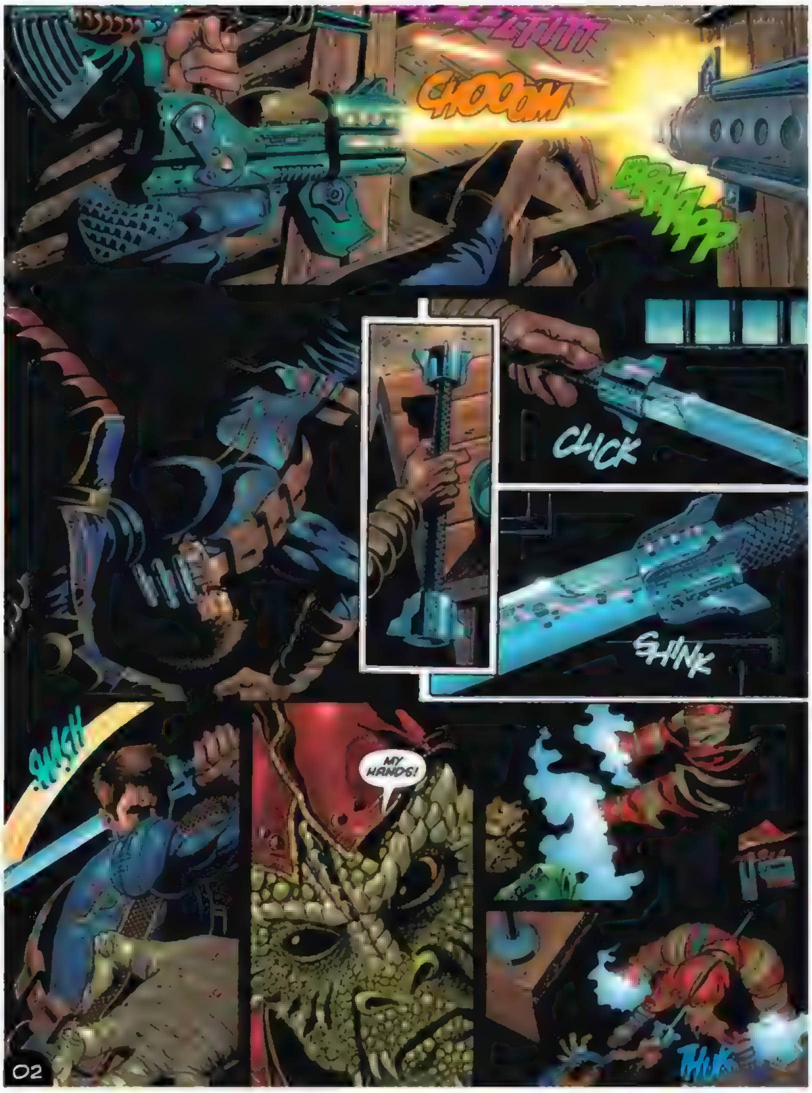
PG: *Sabre* was actually done before I moved to New York, just before the Warren stuff. This was also the period when I drew the very last *Master Of Kung Fu* covers, including my personal favourite, which is the one for #64.

Through Don McGregor, I was introduced to two brothers from Staten Island, Dean and Jan Mullaney. They wanted to publish comics, and one of the first was to be an idea that Don had – and that, of course, became *Sabre*. At this time I was still working up the cover painting samples, but I put that all aside to work on *Sabre*.

CH: Was *Sabre* designed from the outset to appear as a complete work – admittedly one that was only 38 pages long, so more a 'graphic short story' than a graphic novel – rather than as episodic comics?

PG: Yes, *Sabre* was a one-shot deal from cover to cover. I personally look at it, in retrospect, as being as close as I'm going to get to putting my own stamp on comics. All the art in *Sabre* is me, free and clear.

Nobody knew where the book would go, but it ended up selling out and brought in enough profit for Dean to start his own company, Eclipse Comics [an important '80s independent publisher, best known for *Ms Tree*, *The Rocketeer*, *Zot!* and the original US reprints of Alan Moore's *Miracleman*]. Jan, in the meanwhile, enjoys a career as a music producer in Los Angeles, and though Eclipse has long since closed shop, Dean is still in the publishing business. Don, I don't know where he is.

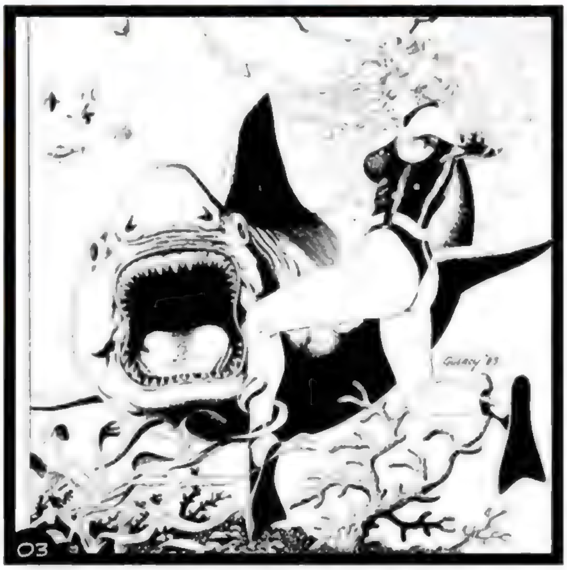


01 & 2 ***Star Wars: Crimson Empire III* #1, Oct 2011**

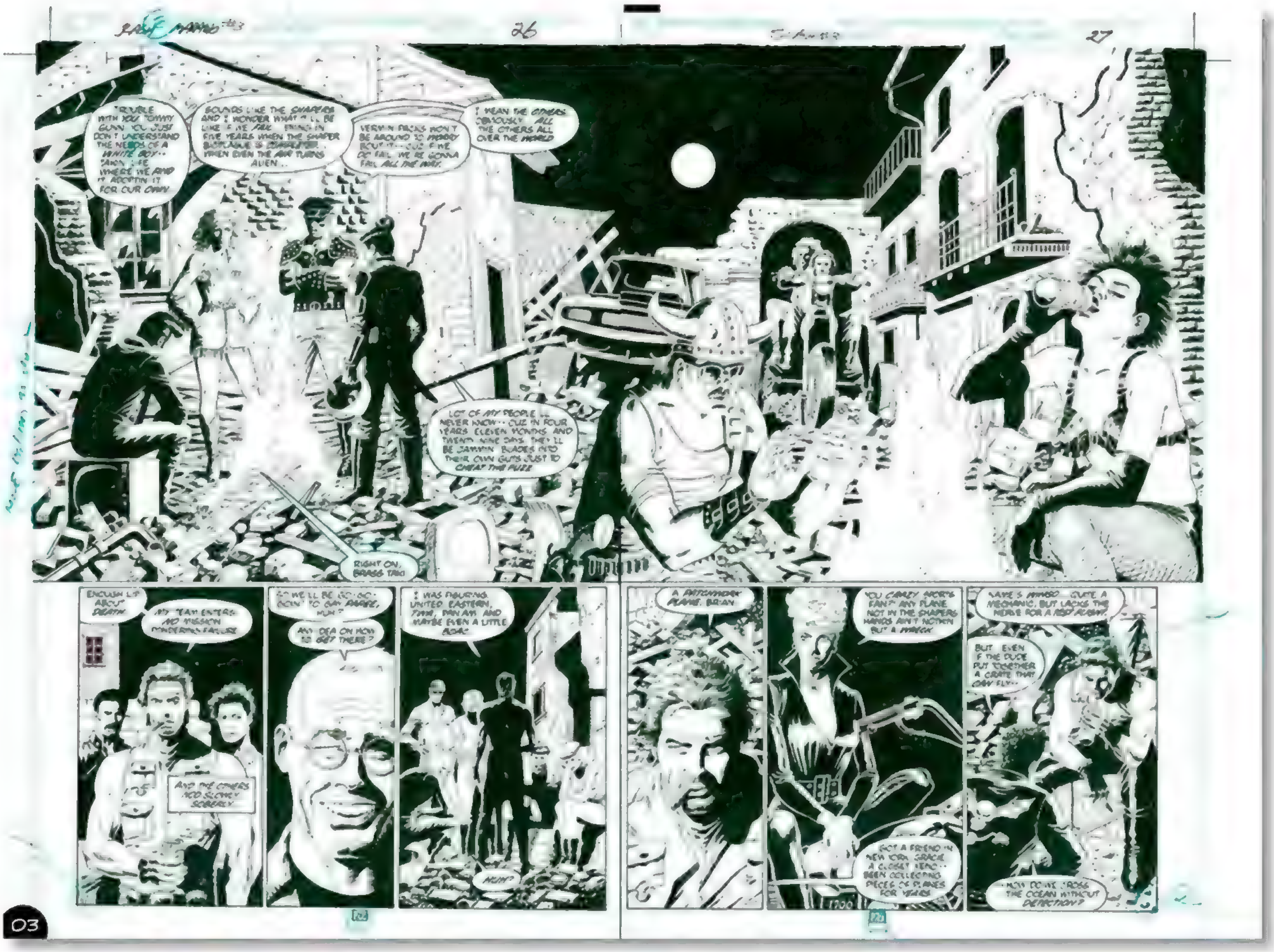
Gulacy's detailed colour-packed art for Dark Horse's Mike Richardson-penned *Star Wars* epic – the last Imperial guardsman, Kir Kanos, finding his way post-Empire.

03 Black Diamond, 1983

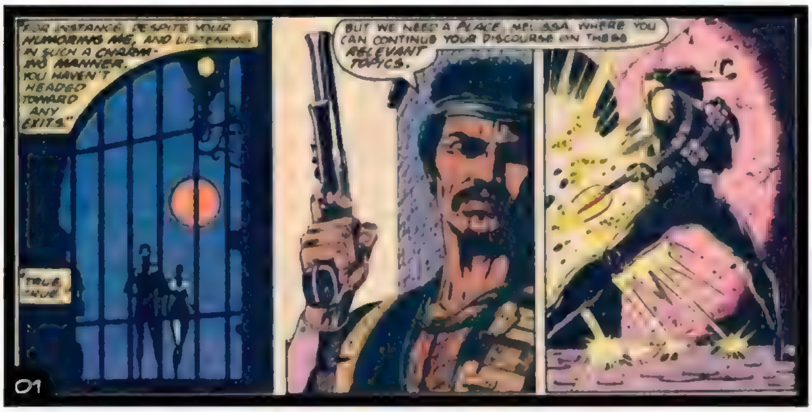
Original Gulacy black-and-white art from an early '80s AC Comics series.



CH: Though you didn't work on the subsequent *Sabre* ongoing series – that was McGregor with his *Black Panther* collaborator Billy Graham – things were hardly quiet during the '80s. Notable were a whole bunch of covers for varied publishers, including two *Logan's Run* covers – one for Marvel and one for Comico – and covers for the original *Nexus* series by Mike Baron and Steve Rude. Were you essentially a gun for hire during this time?


I MEAN THE OTHERS OBVIOUSLY... ALL THE OTHERS ALL OVER THE WORLD
RIGHT ON, BRASS TAG
HUH?

03


"FOR INSTANCE, DESPITE YOUR HUMORING ME, AND LISTENING IN SUCH A CHARMING MANNER, YOU HAVEN'T HEADED TOWARD ANY EXITS."
BUT WE NEED A PLACE, MELISSA, WHERE YOU CAN CONTINUE YOUR DISCOURSE ON THESE RELEVANT TOPICS.
"TRUE, LOVE"

01

01&2 ***Sabre: Slow Fade Of An Endangered Species*, 1978**

One of the earliest graphic novels – and featuring a black lead as well! – Gulacy and Don McGregor's *Sabre* was groundbreaking stuff.

03 ***Slash Maraud #3*, Jan 1988**

Another Doug Moench collaboration, this time featuring alien invaders and the imminent end of humanity.

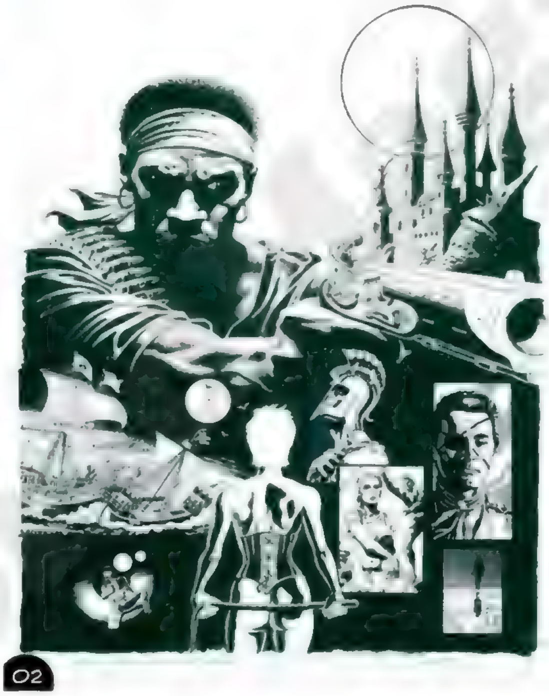
PG: The *Logan's Run* covers were literally just stuff falling out of the sky – an editor calls and says, 'You wanna do this?' As far as *Nexus* is concerned… Well, I've been friends with Steve for 35 years; I was the best man at his wedding. I did the original *Nexus* covers as a favour to him. He was, and still is, a huge Shang-Chi fan, and he visits my wife and I every year as a houseguest.

CH: And how is it now? With all the *Star Wars* stuff going on, you're still working regularly in the industry...

PG: I'm currently not under contract with anyone, but I'm continually working. The last stuff I did for Marvel was a *Cable* series, not long ago. In 2011, I worked on *Star Wars: Crimson Empire 3* with Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley, and that continued into 2012. Prior to that was a series with Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti called *Time Bomb* for Radical Publishing.

Right now I'm at IDW Comics, working on *GI Joe* with writer Chuck Dixon. And I'm very happy with it, quite frankly!

Paul still does commissions for fans, when he gets the time; you can contact him through his website at gulacy.com.



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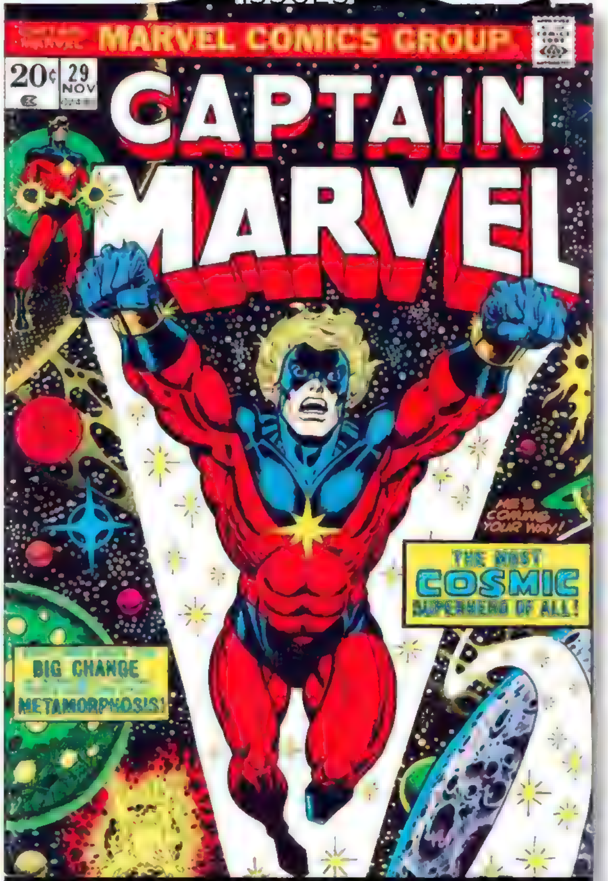
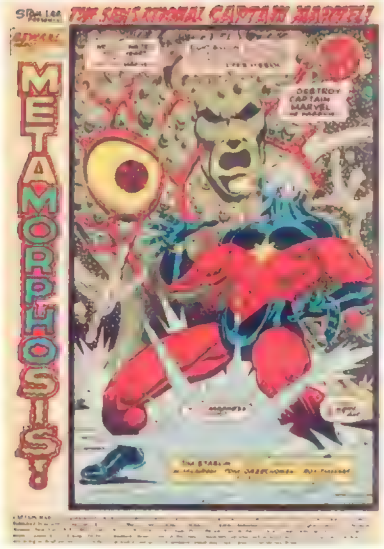
BIG ISSUES



CAPTAIN MARVEL #29 | **STORY** 'Metamorphosis'
BY Jim Starlin with Al Milgrom | **DATE** Nov 1973

"You have become aware..."

It was the moment Marvel went truly cosmic: Captain Marvel was transformed, Jim Starlin reinvented himself, and nasty Thanos stepped to the fore... By James Lovegrove


THE SENSATIONAL CAPTAIN MARVEL!
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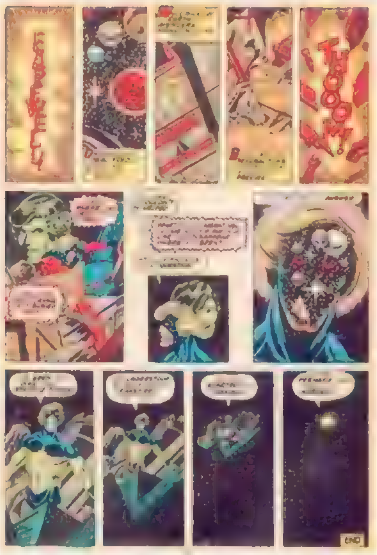
DESTROY CAPTAIN MARVEL

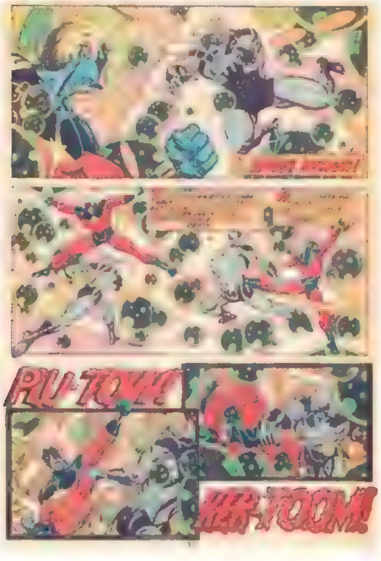


The adventures of Kree warrior Mar-Vell began in 1967, in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #12, and continued into his own title the following year. In his first incarnation, Mar-Vell was a misunderstood alien soldier who had developed a fondness for the Earth people his technologically superior race were supposed to be conquering, and so did his utmost to foil his superiors' plans. For added pathos there was a soap-operatic love triangle between him, ship's medic Una, and their cruel commanding officer, Colonel Yon-Rogg.

It was lumpy, lacklustre stuff on the whole, delivered by a string of writers and artists who didn't seem to give a damn. As Roy Thomas puts it in his introduction to the third volume of the *Marvel Masterworks Captain Marvel* collections, "nobody [...] revered Mar-Vell all that much in his first 16 issues, including probably his creative team."

But then, the first hints of change. In collaboration with artist Gil Kane, Thomas revamped Mar-Vell in #17, giving him a radically different look and the ability to trade places with Marvel's resident teen rebel Rick Jones simply by slapping his wristbands together.

After five Thomas/Kane issues, *Captain Marvel* chugged along for a while longer – perfunctorily written by Gerry Conway and Marv Wolfman and illustrated by the all-too-aptly named Wayne Boring. It just managed to dodge cancellation, but things must have been close. Then, with #26, Jim Starlin stepped aboard as penciller, working to scripts by Mike Friedrich. By #29 Starlin was scripting too, as well as colouring, with inker Al Milgrom aiding him on the art.


PU-TOW!
KER-TOOM!

By this stage, plot threads were already in place that would serve Starlin well for the remainder of his run – and lay the foundations for countless future intergalactic epics. Starlin's creation, Thanos, was coming to the fore as a formidable Big Bad. His nemesis, Drax the Destroyer, was engaged in the seemingly futile task of trying to bring him down, while the supporting cast was rounded out by the godlike denizens of Saturn's moon Titan, notably Mentor and Eros.

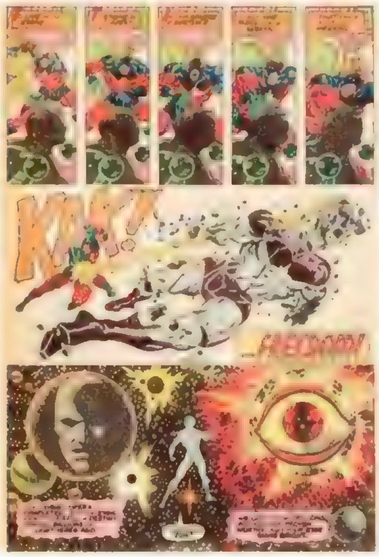
Issue #29 is where things really start to get good. Entitled 'Metamorphosis!', it opens just after Mar-Vell has been transported to a far-flung solar system by the all-powerful cosmic-vegetable entity known as Eon. Eon reveals the backstory behind the creation of Titan's paradisal civilisation, which ties into ancient Greek myth, before forcing our hero to confront his past life as a loyal, unthinking Kree footsoldier.

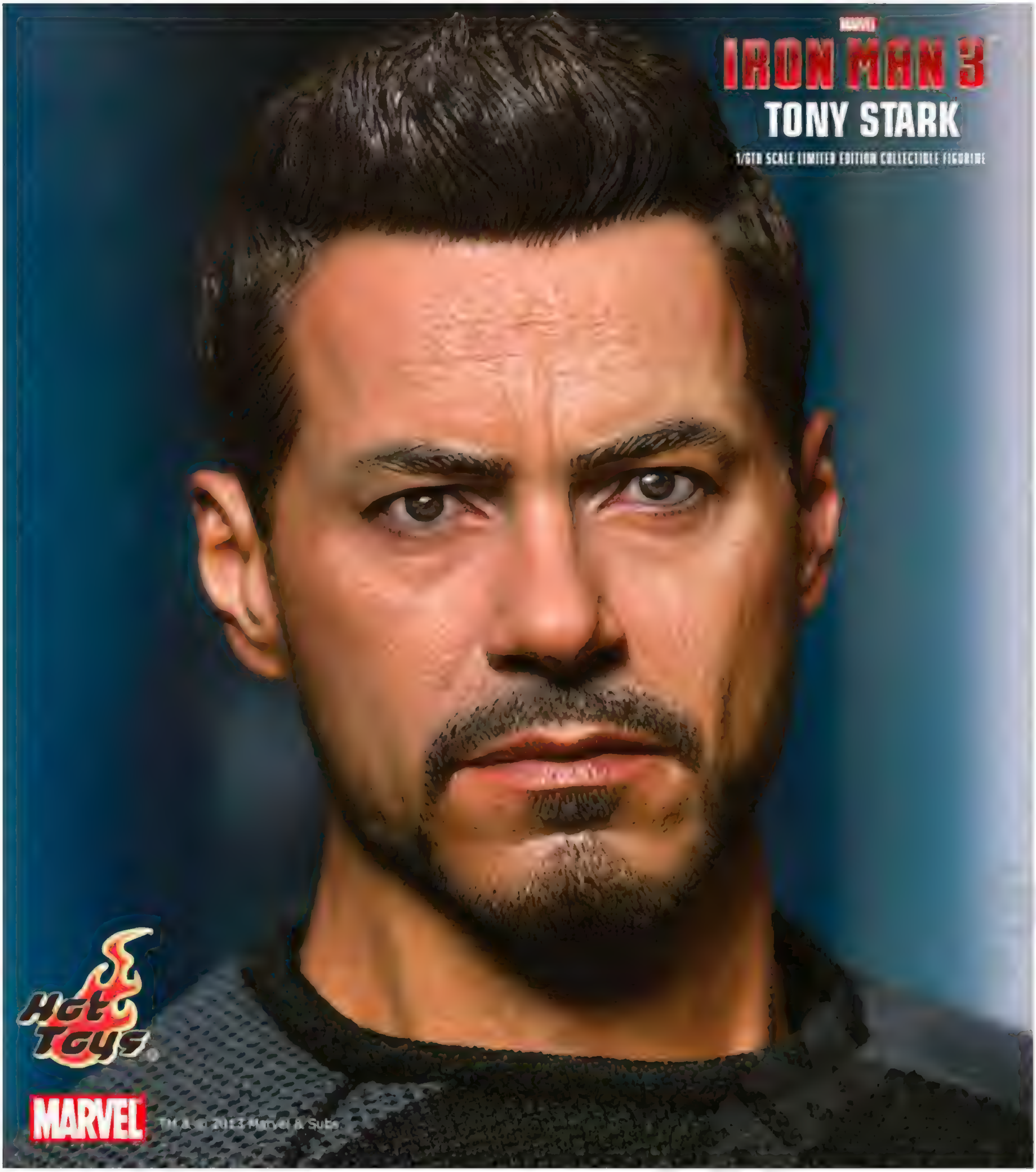
Starlin himself was a former Navy man, now turned something of a hippy, and parts of Eon's monologue read very much like a homily from the writer: 'Man gives many reasons for battle but can one truly believe that any cause is worth all the blood that war spills? Is it worth the dead, the crippled, the lost?'

Mar-Vell sees the error of his militaristic ways. He renounces his Kree heritage and permits himself to be physically altered by Eon. He is gifted with 'cosmic awareness' – an 'enhanced reception to life', a kind of all-purpose sixth sense. All that remains is for him to battle an inner demon, a 'cancerous other self' comprised of his battle lust and love of destruction. Once this physical manifestation of metaphor has been defeated, Mar-Vell's ego is cleansed and he is ready to fulfil his potential as protector of the universe.

Even more thrilling than this heady melange of transcendentalism and mystic psychobabble is Starlin's own transformation from accomplished mimicker of Jack Kirby and Gil Kane to full-blown, distinctive artist in his own right. This issue is replete with all the visual stylistic tics we have since come to associate with Starlin: repeat-image sequences, psychedelic starscapes, tiny inset panels, coruscating bursts of energy, trippy distortions of anatomy.

With *Captain Marvel* #29, Starlin emerged from his chrysalis and spread his wings to become a noteworthy and influential comics innovator. The metamorphosis was as much the creator's as the creation's. **CH**

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#5 May/June 2013

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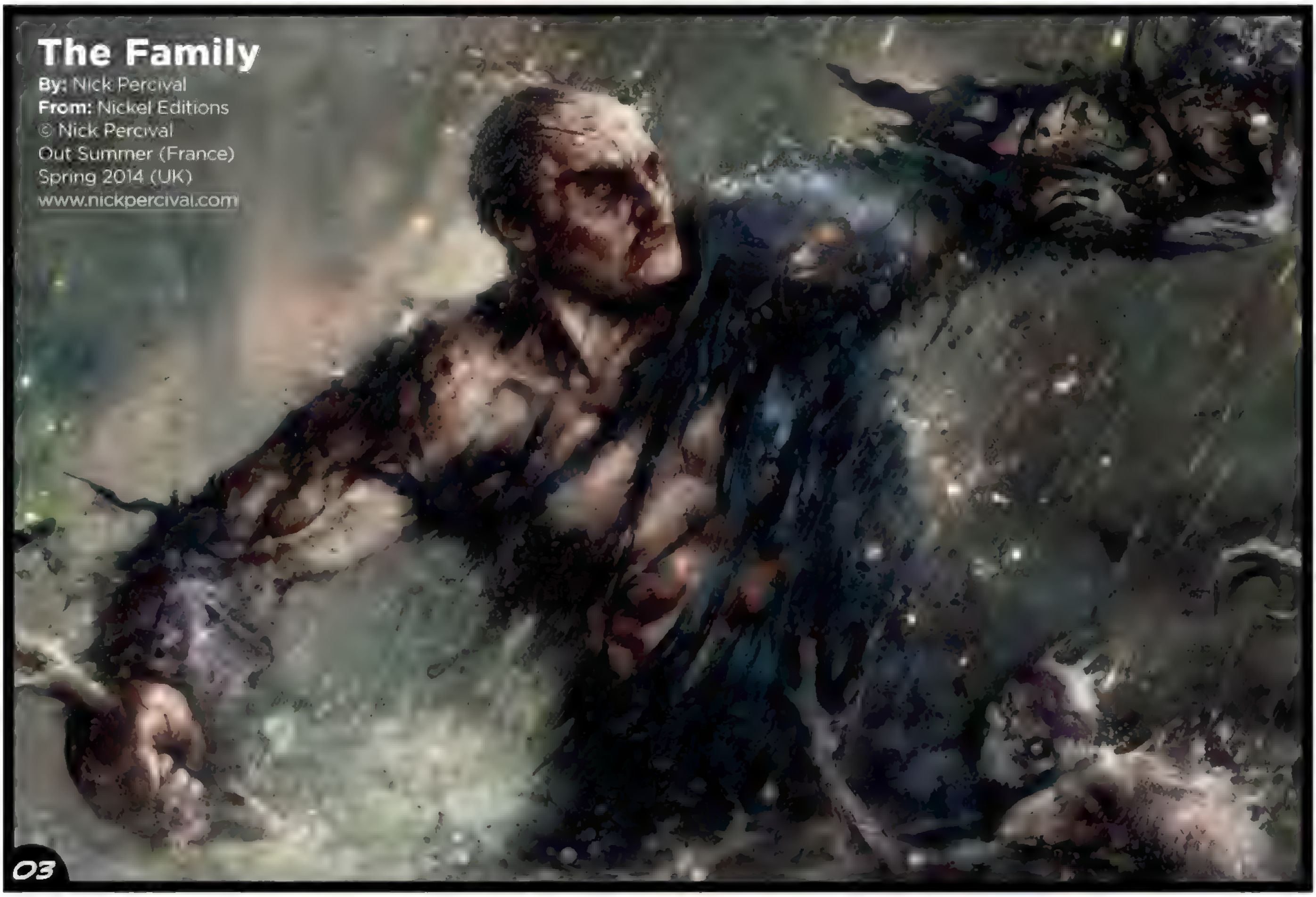

The Family

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Gummi Shits!
11

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Sounding
SHANKS IS A MENACE!!!
33

Crater XV

By: Kevin Cannon
From: Top Shelf Productions
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Out May
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Don Quixote Vol 2

By: Rob Davis, after Cervantes
From: SelfMadeHero
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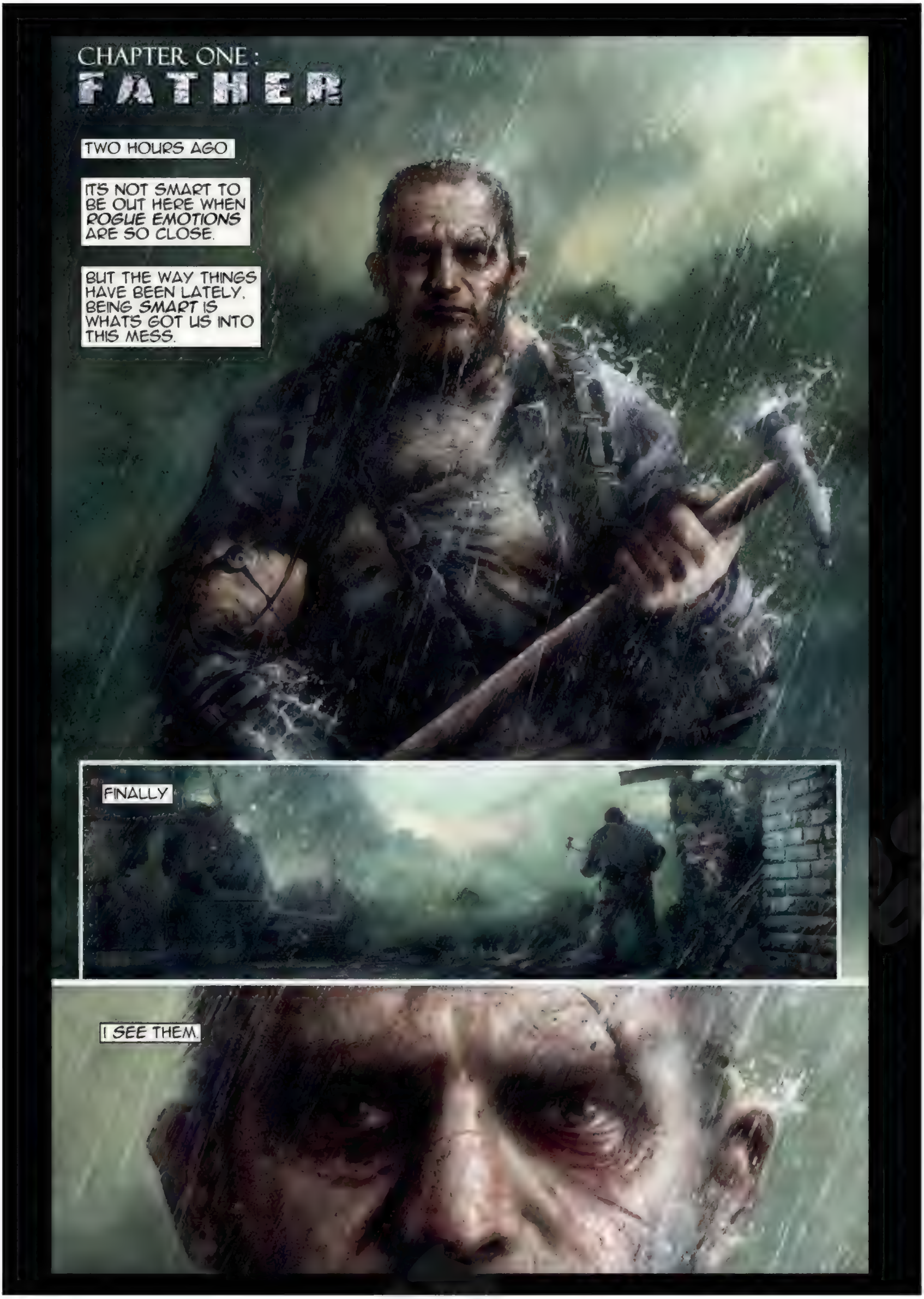
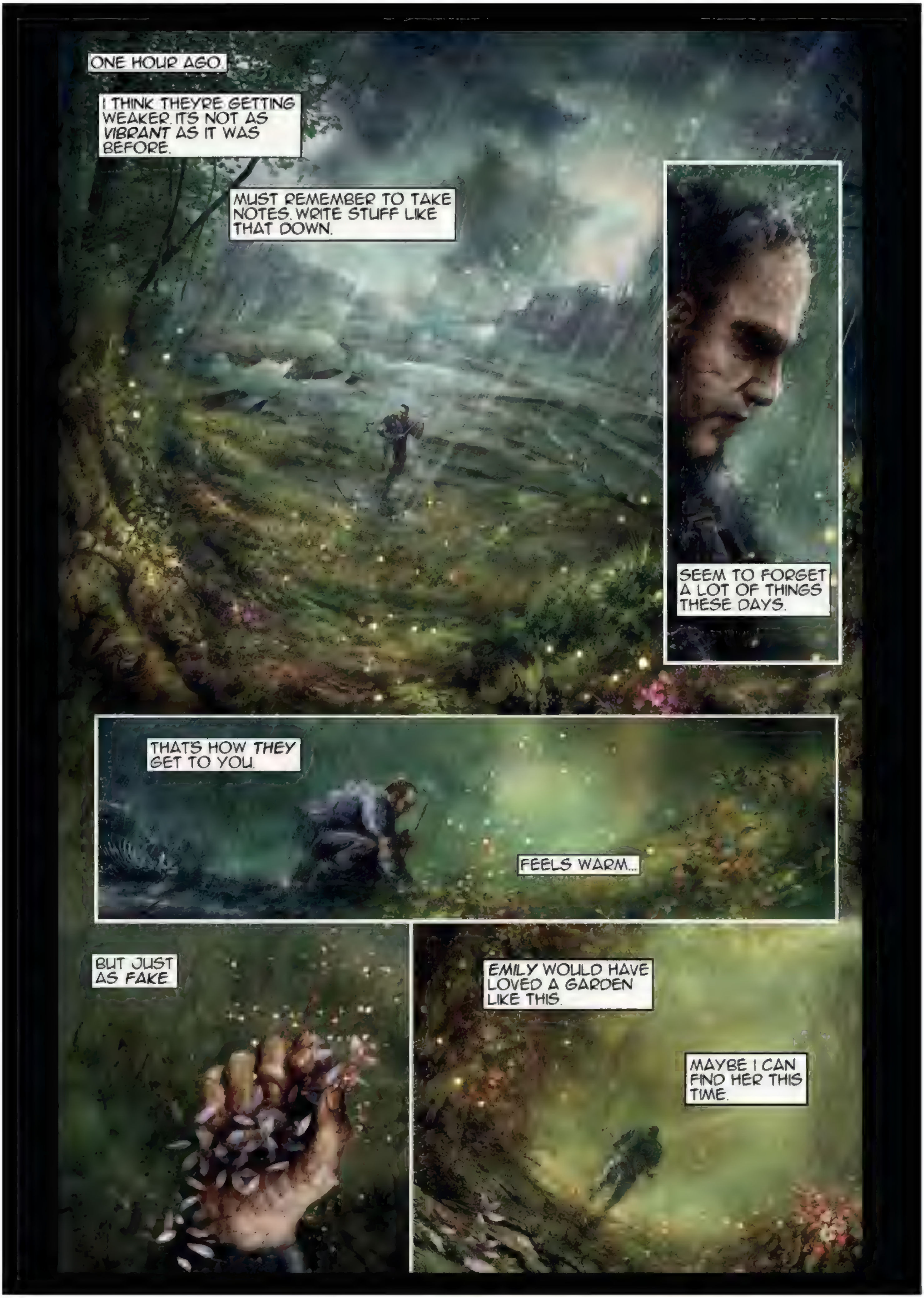
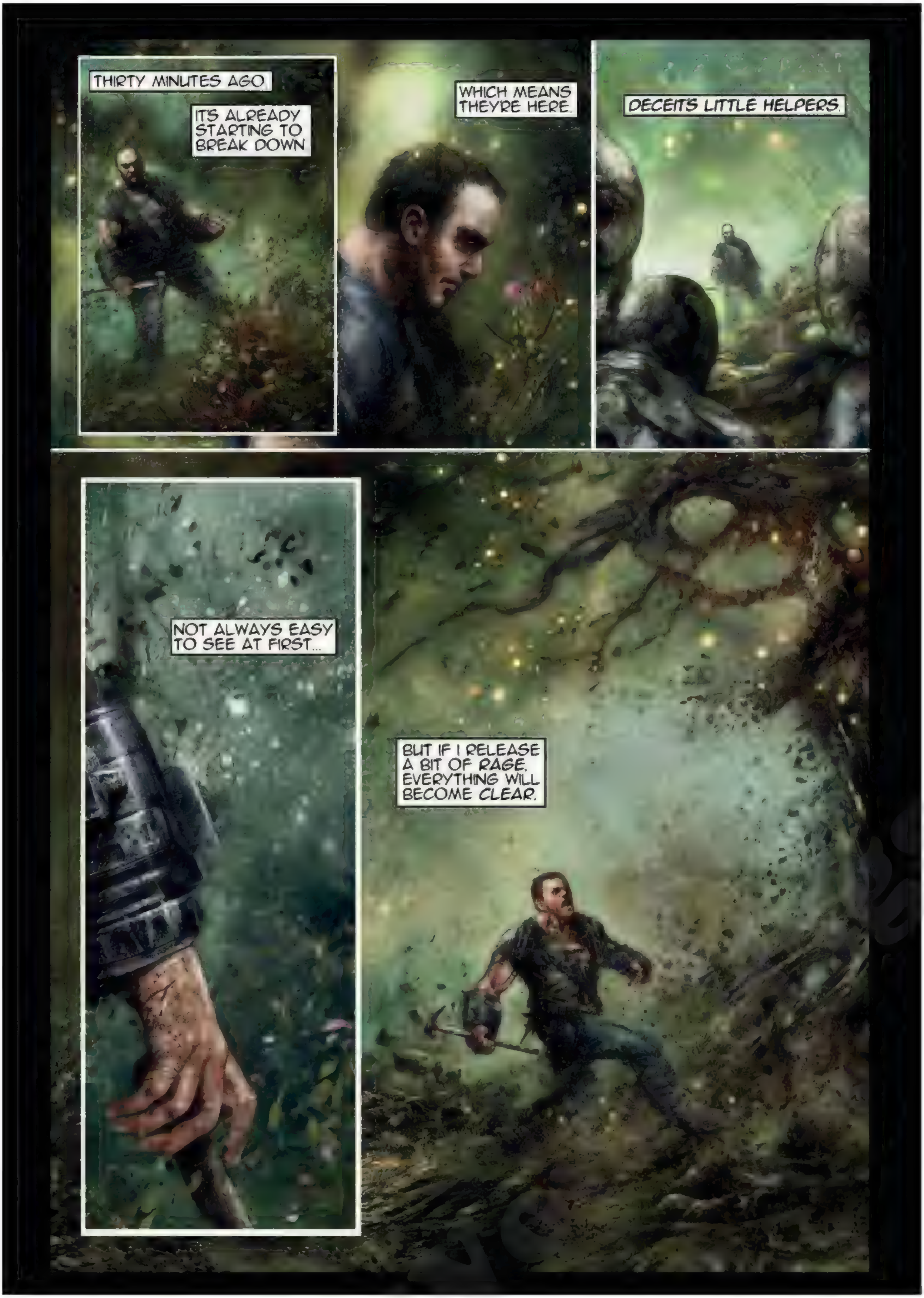
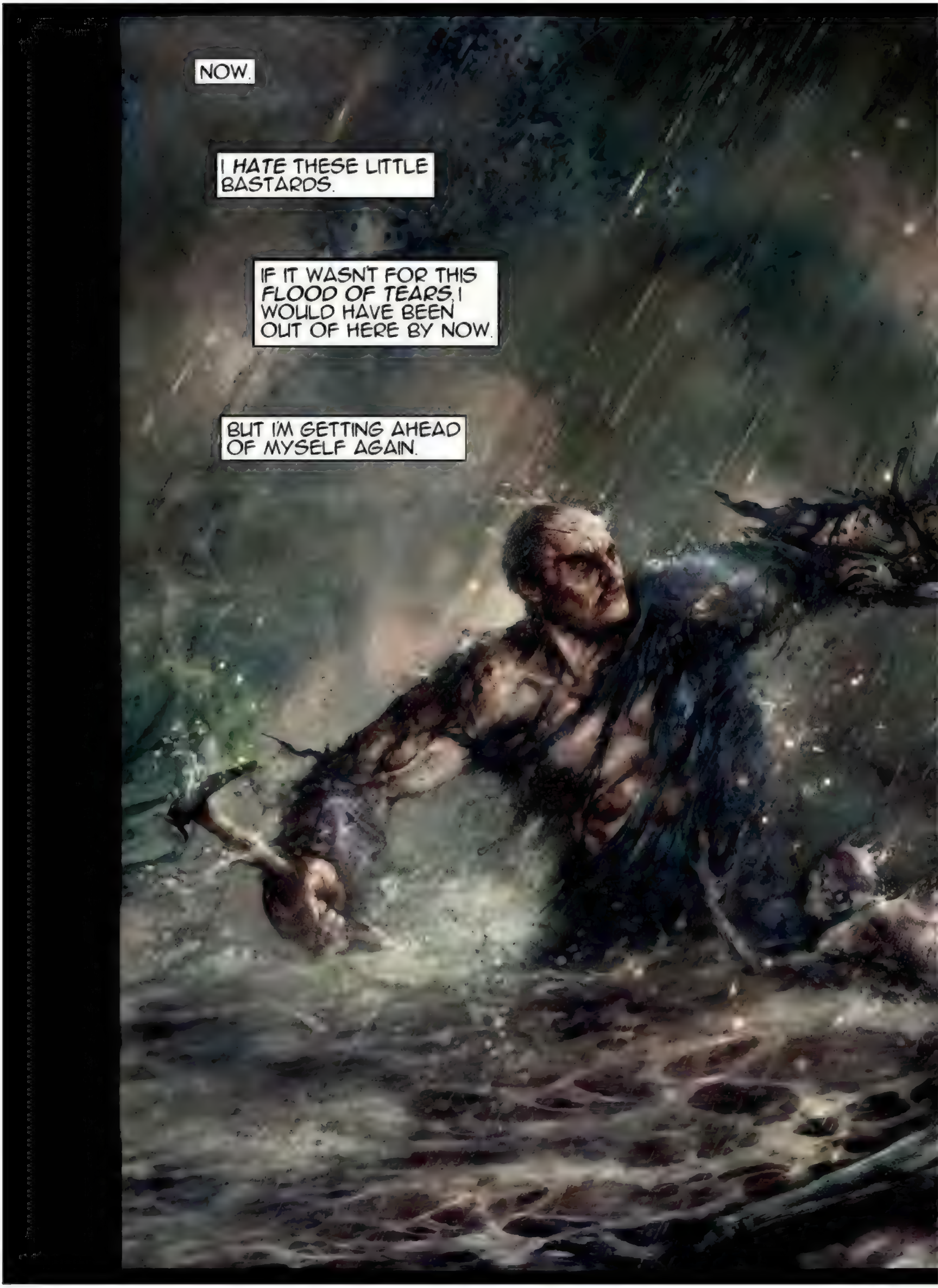
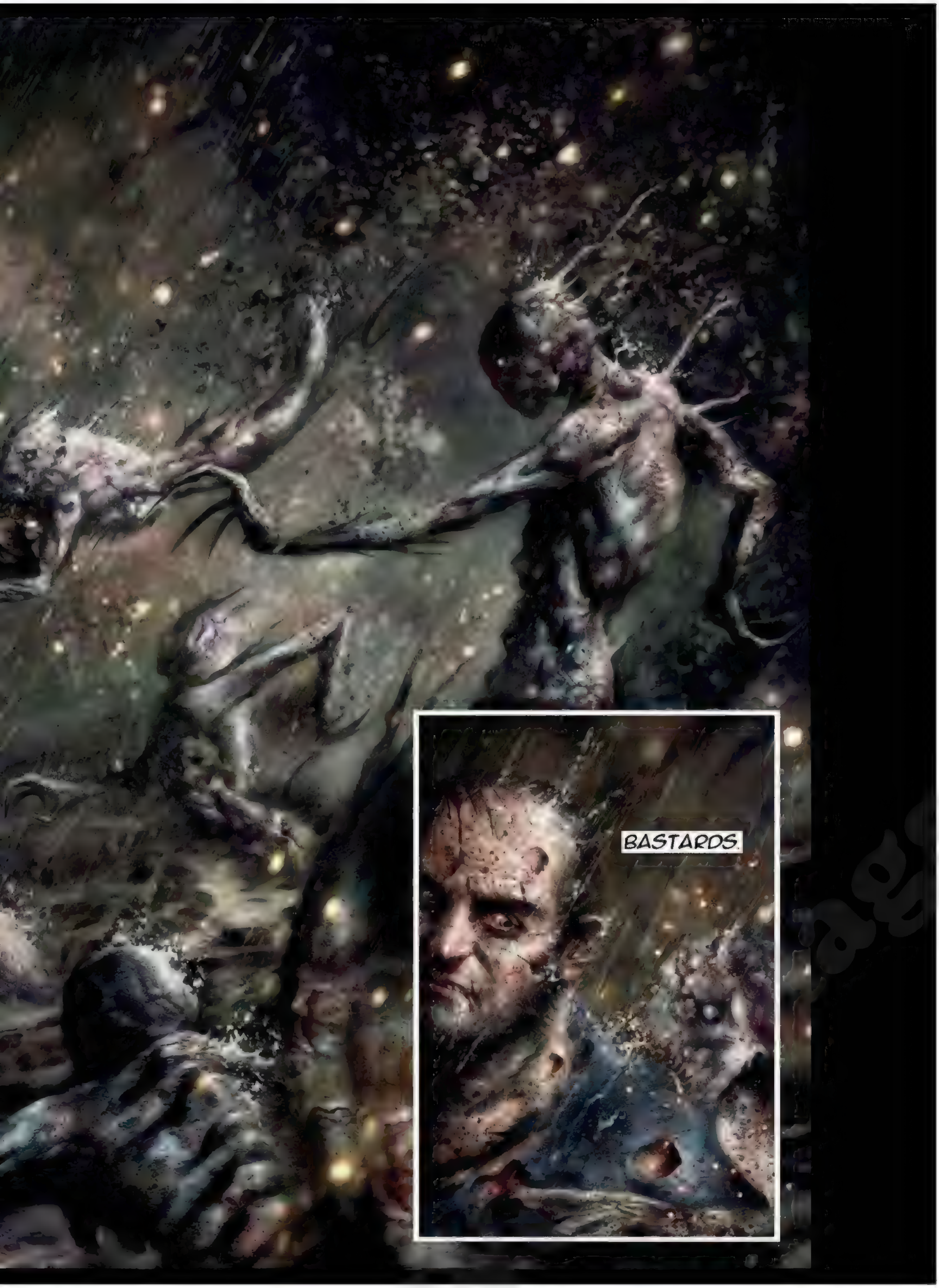
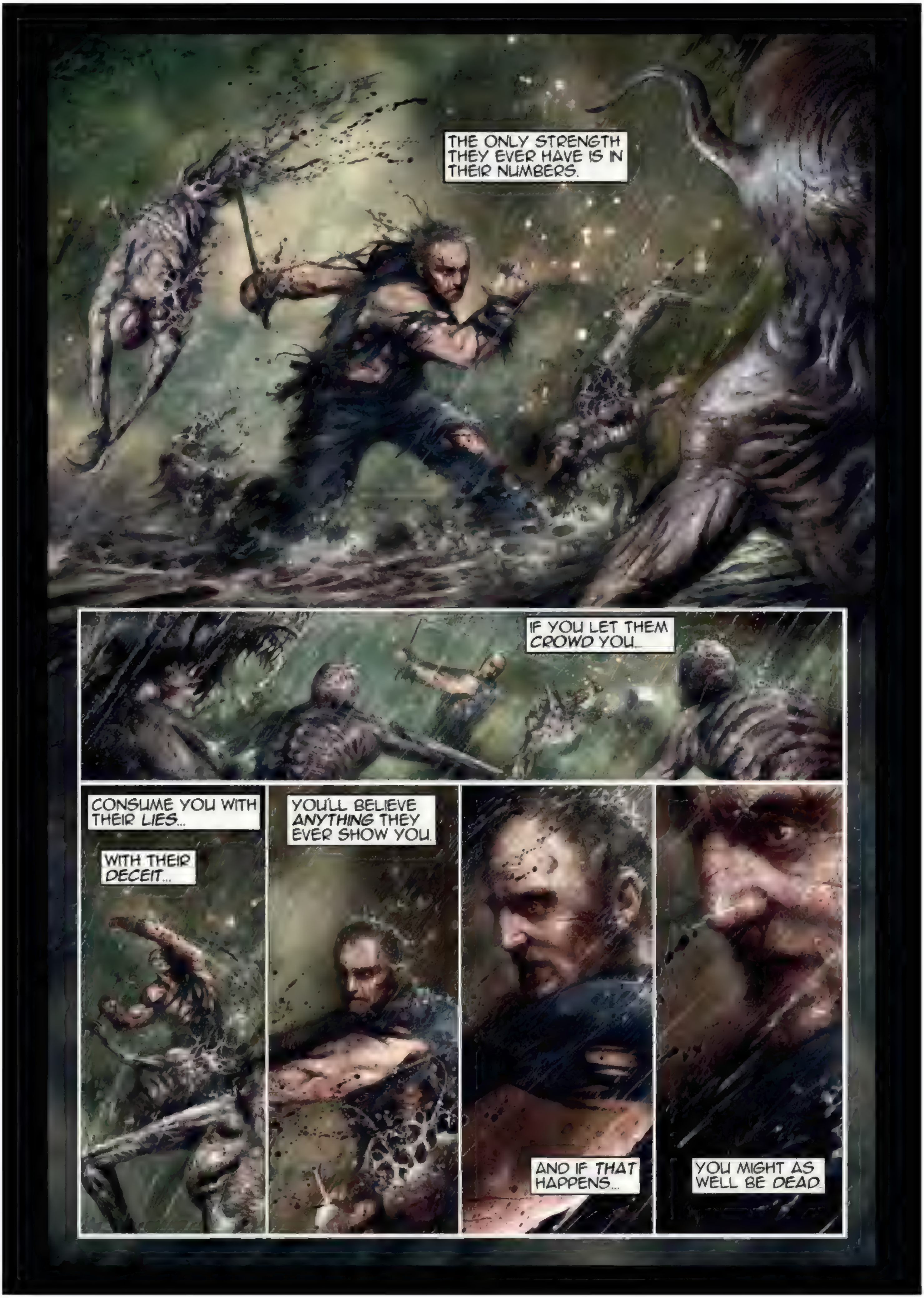

CHAPTER ONE :
FATHER
TWO HOURS AGO
IT'S NOT SMART TO BE OUT HERE WHEN *ROGUE EMOTIONS* ARE SO CLOSE.
BUT THE WAY THINGS HAVE BEEN LATELY, BEING *SMART* IS WHATS GOT US INTO THIS MESS.
FINALLY.
I SEE THEM.

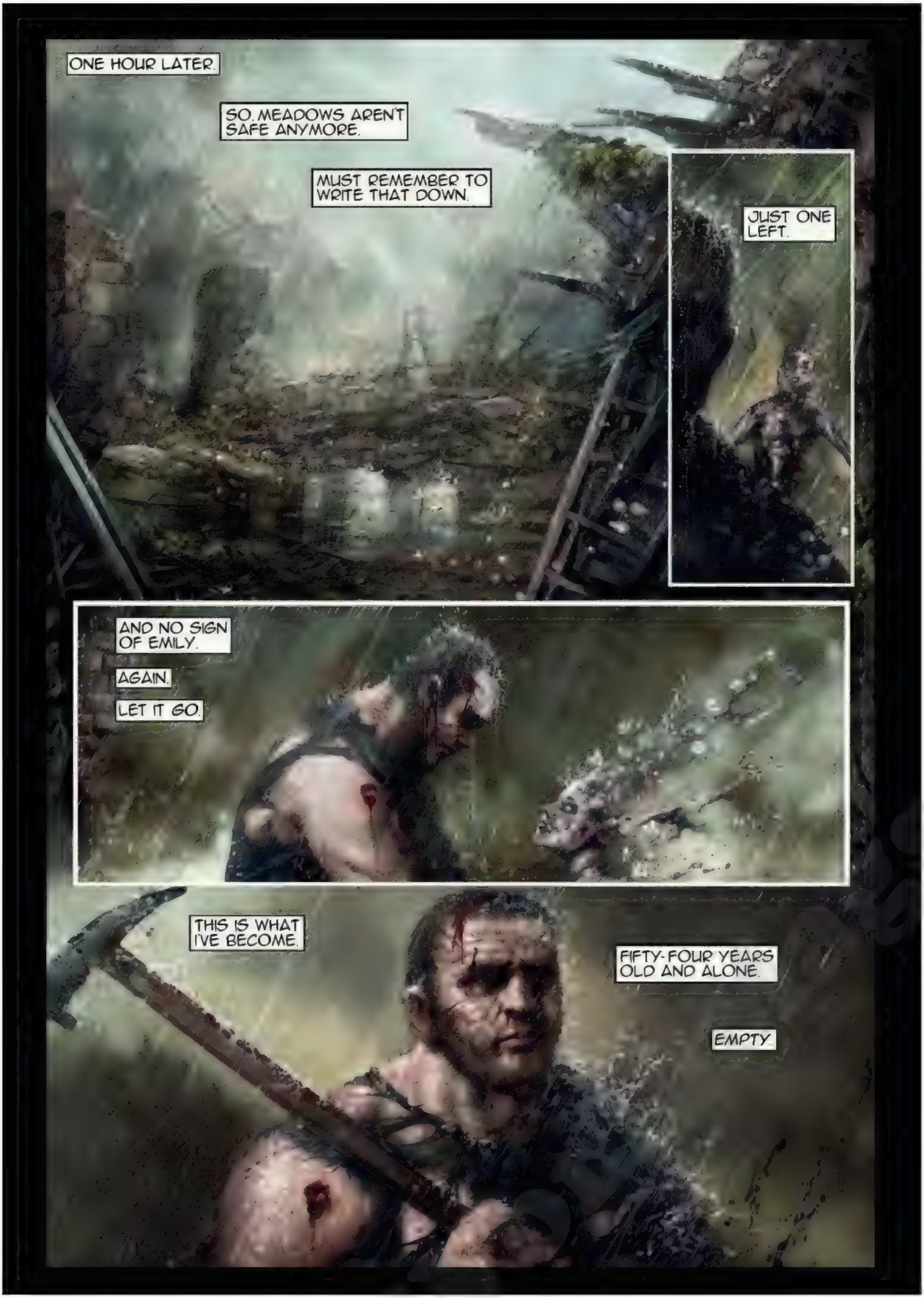

ONE HOUR AGO.
I THINK THEY'RE GETTING WEAKER. IT'S NOT AS *VIBRANT* AS IT WAS BEFORE.
MUST REMEMBER TO TAKE NOTES. WRITE STUFF LIKE THAT DOWN.
SEEM TO FORGET A LOT OF THINGS THESE DAYS.
THAT'S HOW *THEY* GET TO YOU.
FEELS WARM...
BUT JUST AS *FAKE*.
EMILY WOULD HAVE LOVED A GARDEN LIKE THIS.
MAYBE I CAN FIND HER THIS TIME.

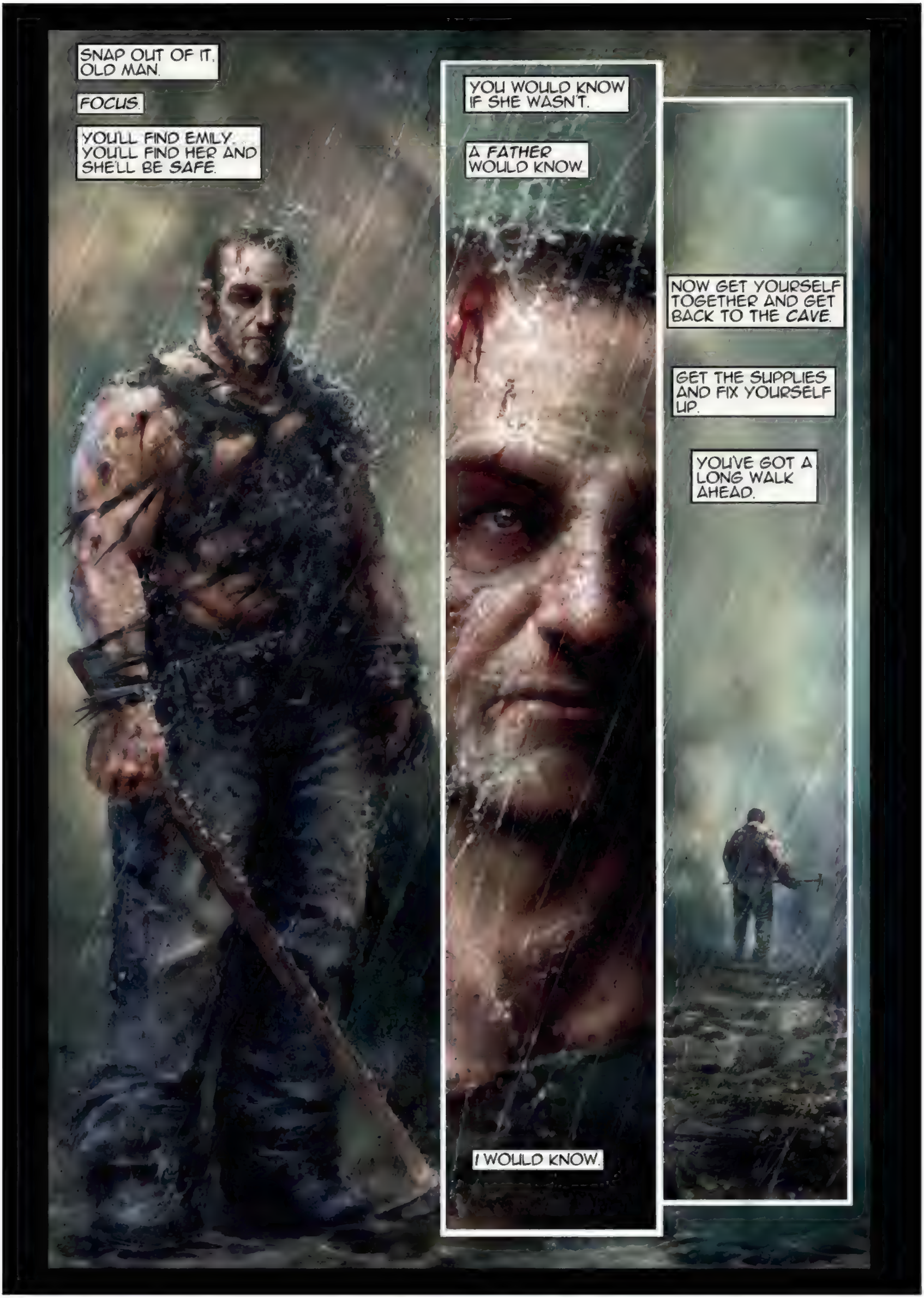

THIRTY MINUTES AGO.
ITS ALREADY STARTING TO BREAK DOWN
WHICH MEANS THEYRE HERE.
DECEITS LITTLE HELPERS.
NOT ALWAYS EASY TO SEE AT FIRST...
BUT IF I RELEASE A BIT OF RAGE, EVERYTHING WILL BECOME CLEAR.

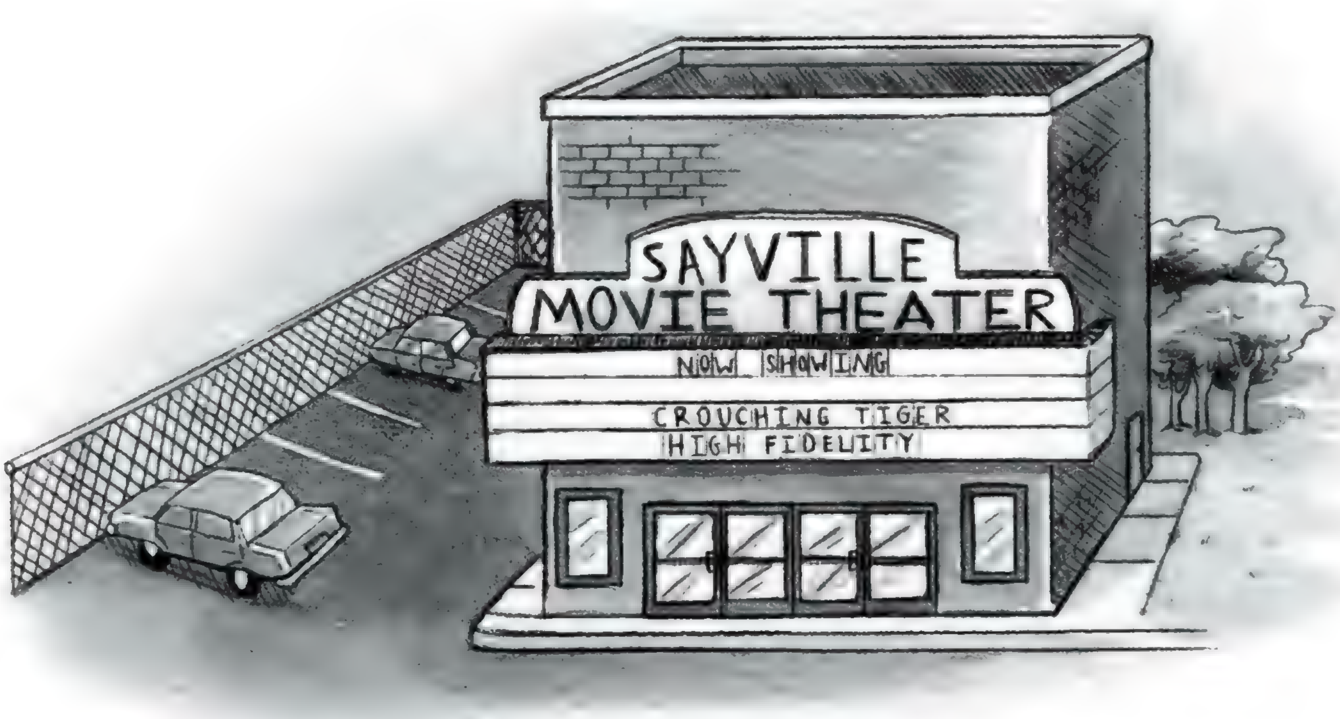

NOW.
I HATE THESE LITTLE BASTARDS.
IF IT WASN'T FOR THIS FLOOD OF TEARS, I WOULD HAVE BEEN OUT OF HERE BY NOW.
BUT I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF AGAIN.


BASTARDS.

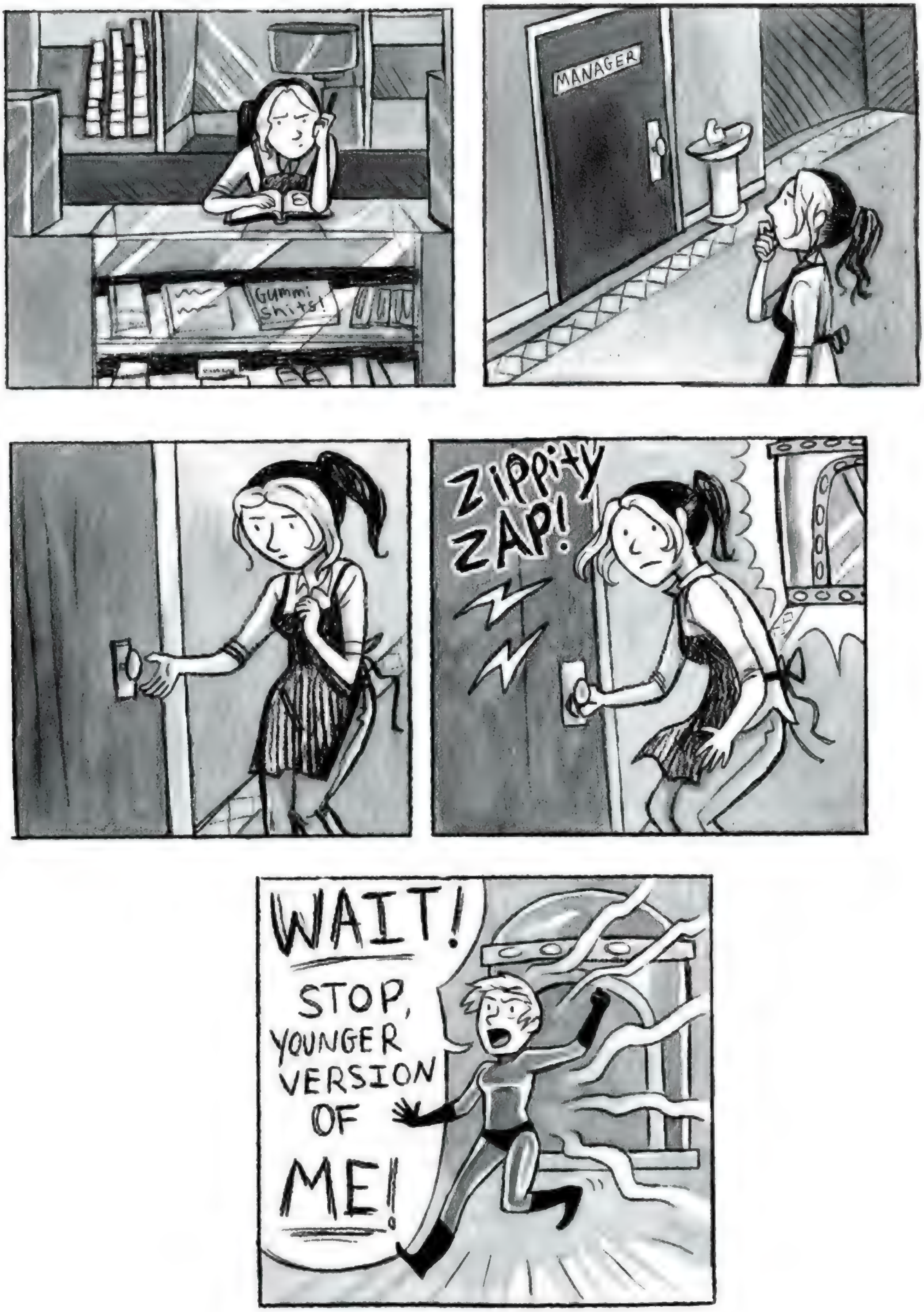

THE ONLY STRENGTH THEY EVER HAVE IS IN THEIR NUMBERS.
IF YOU LET THEM CROWD YOU...
CONSUME YOU WITH THEIR LIES...
WITH THEIR DECEIT...
YOU'LL BELIEVE ANYTHING THEY EVER SHOW YOU.
AND IF THAT HAPPENS...
YOU MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD.

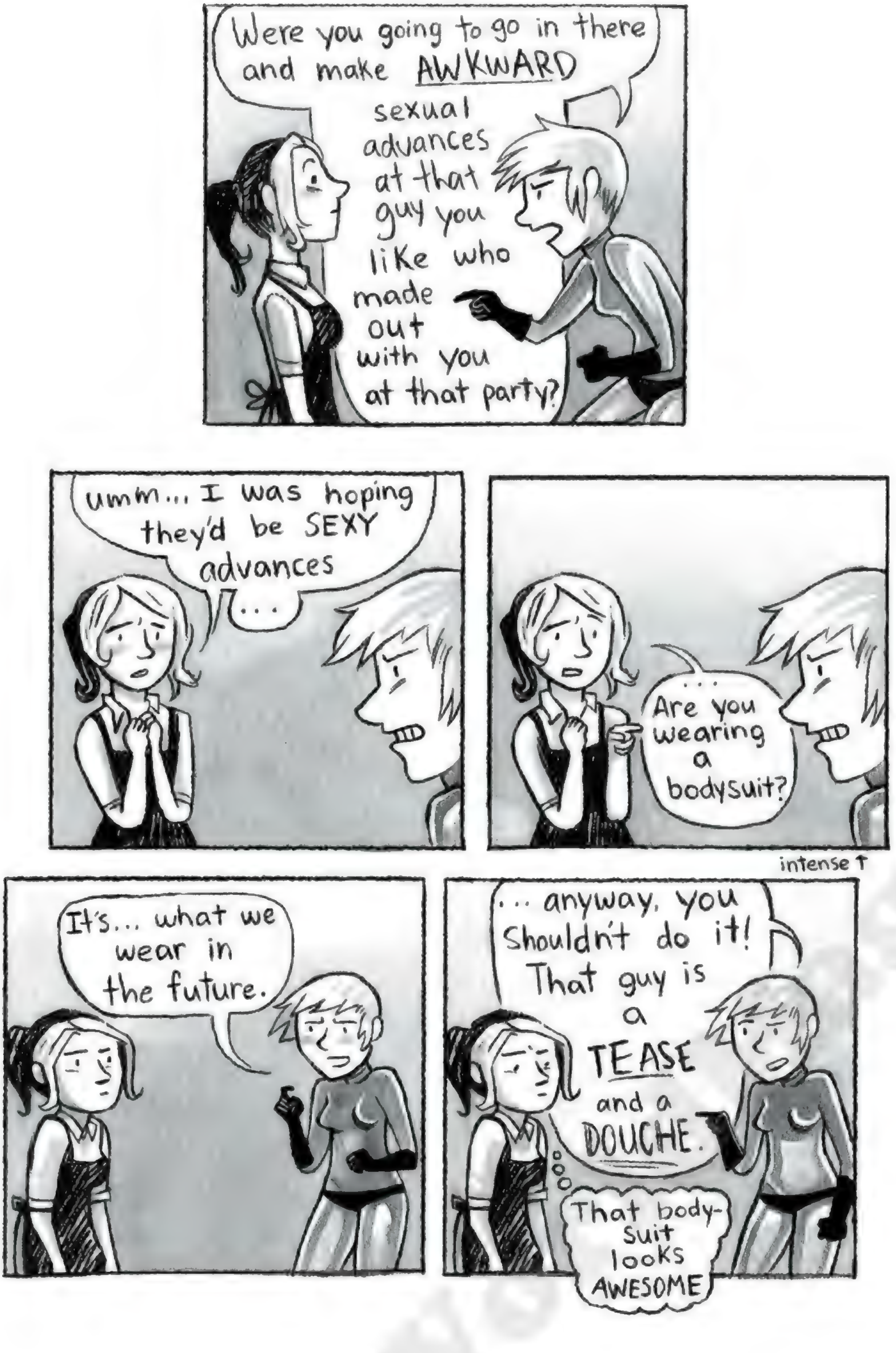

ONE HOUR LATER.
SO. MEADOWS AREN'T SAFE ANYMORE.
MUST REMEMBER TO WRITE THAT DOWN.
JUST ONE LEFT.
AND NO SIGN OF EMILY.
AGAIN.
LET IT GO.
THIS IS WHAT I'VE BECOME.
FIFTY-FOUR YEARS OLD AND ALONE.
EMPTY.

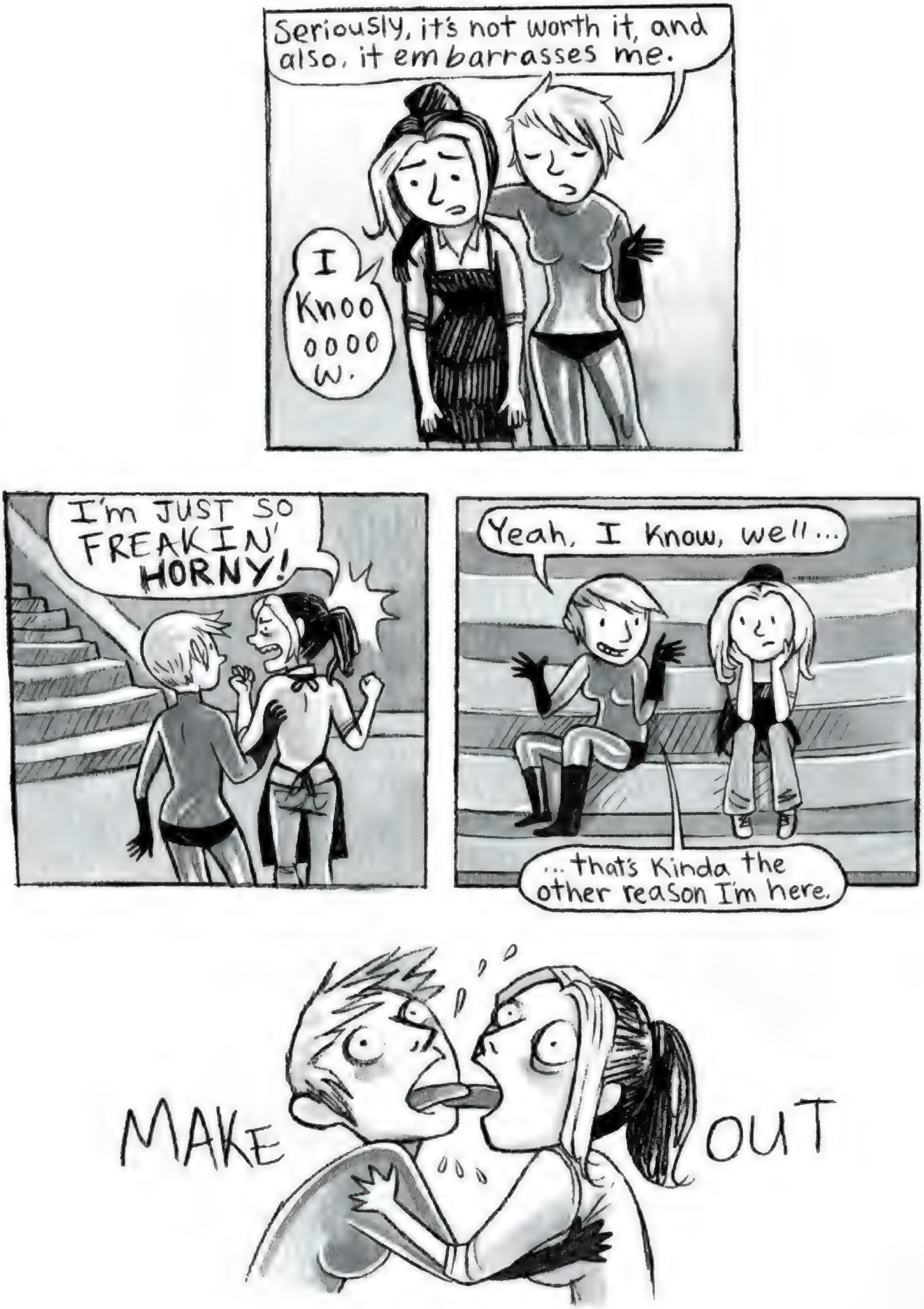

SNAP OUT OF IT, OLD MAN.
FOCUS.
YOU'LL FIND EMILY. YOU'LL FIND HER AND SHE'LL BE SAFE.
YOU WOULD KNOW IF SHE WASN'T.
A FATHER WOULD KNOW.
I WOULD KNOW.
NOW GET YOURSELF TOGETHER AND GET BACK TO THE CAVE.
GET THE SUPPLIES AND FIX YOURSELF UP.
YOU'VE GOT A LONG WALK AHEAD.

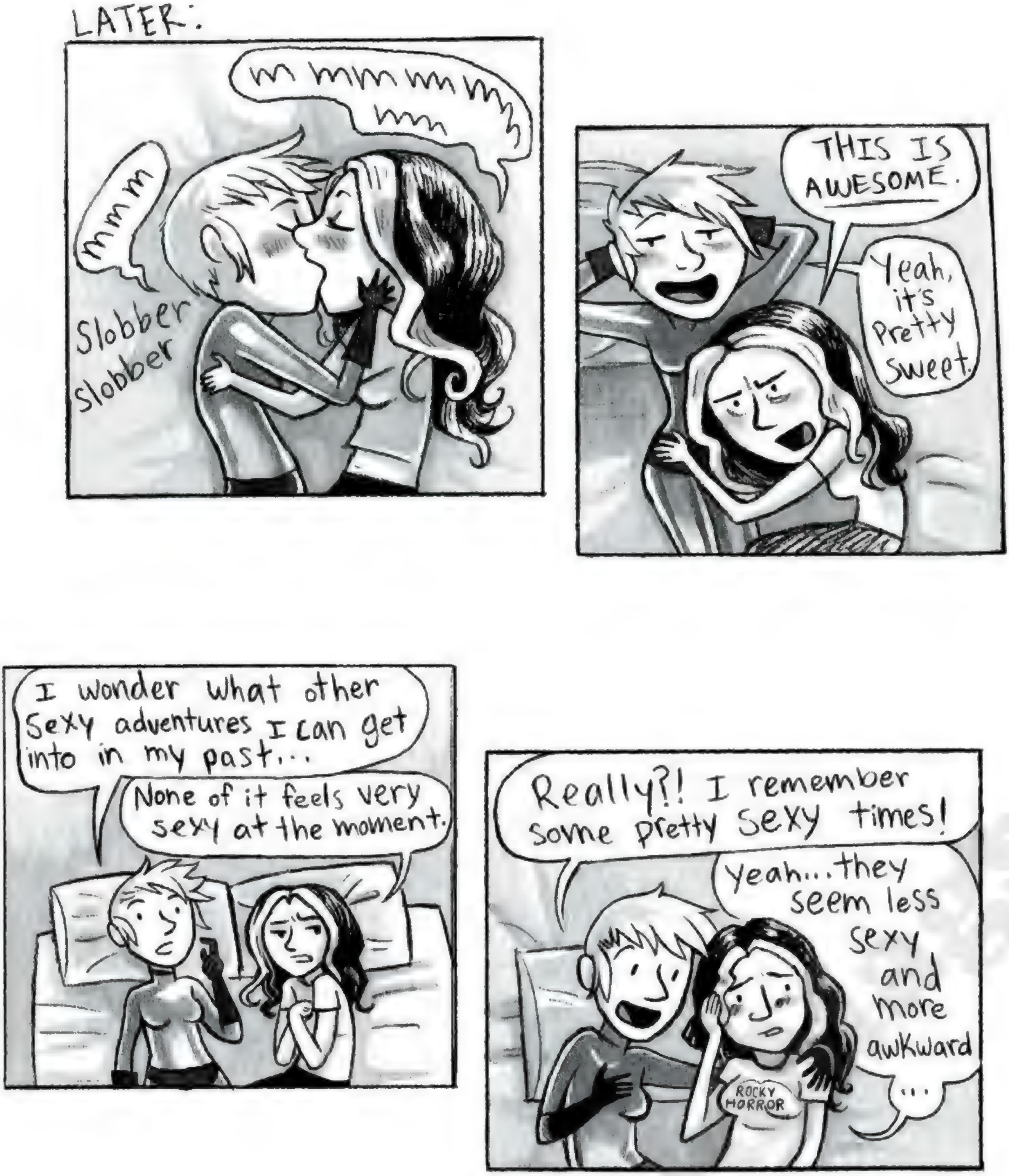

SAYVILLE
MOVIE THEATER
NOW SHOWING
CROUCHING TIGER
HIGH FIDELITY

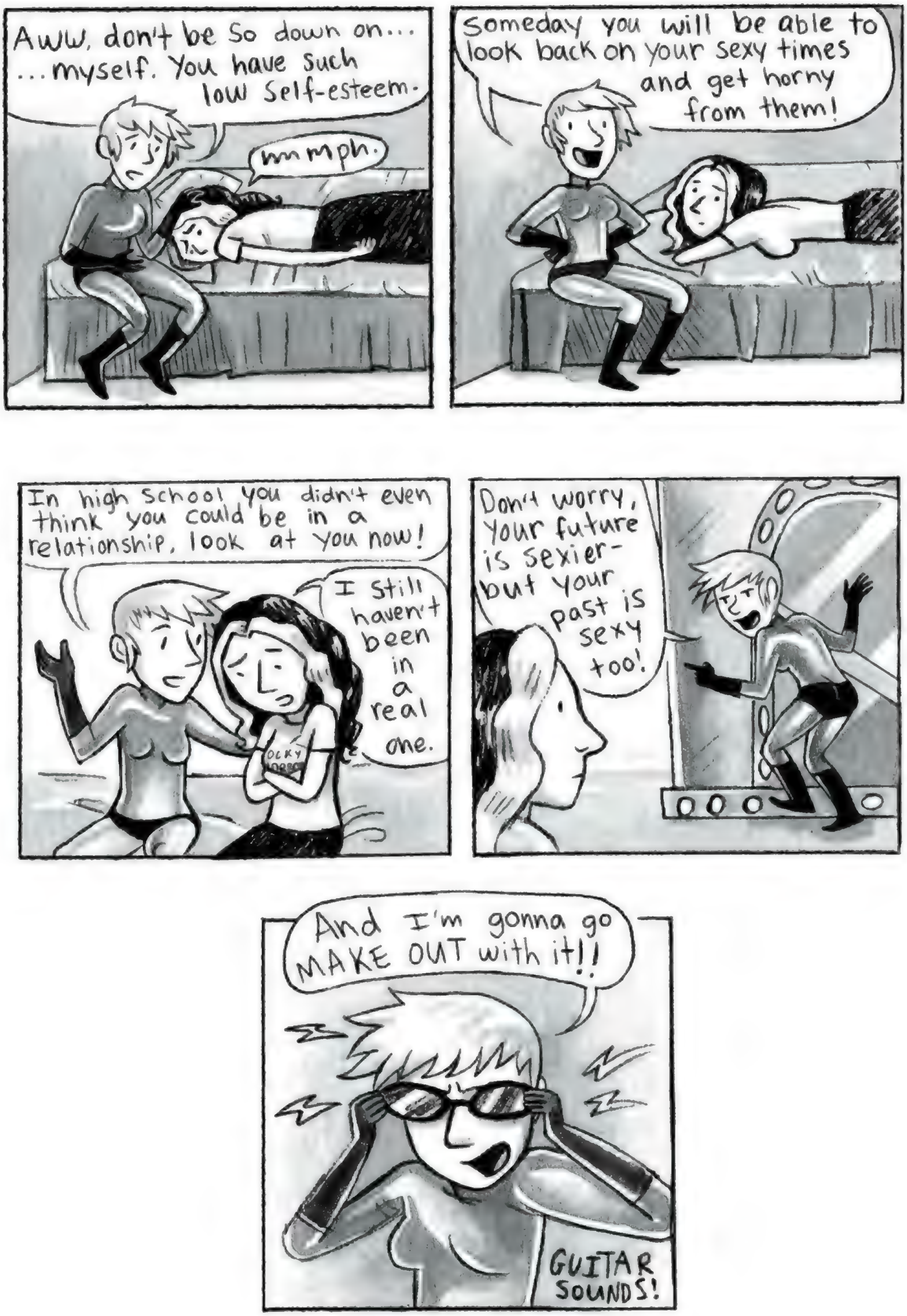
WorldMags

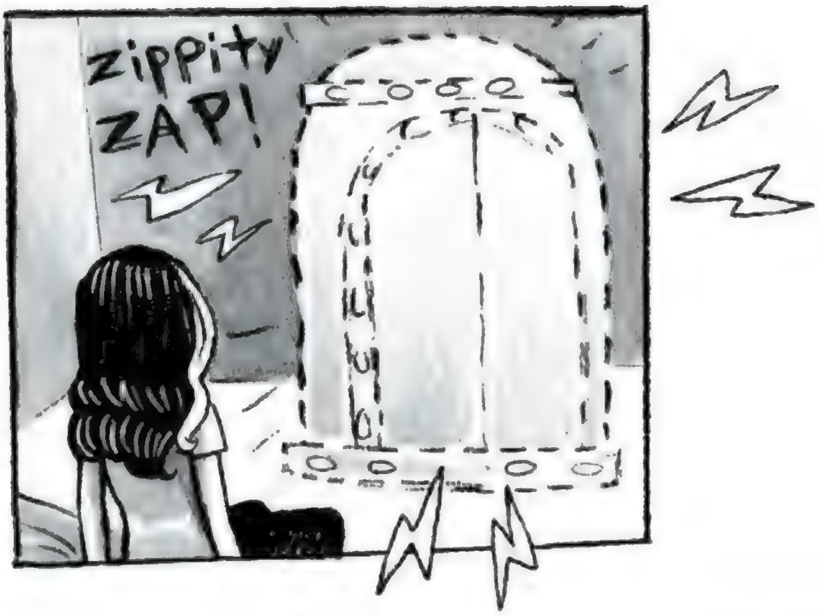

Gummi Shits!
MANAGER
Zippity ZAP!
WAIT! STOP, YOUNGER VERSION OF ME!

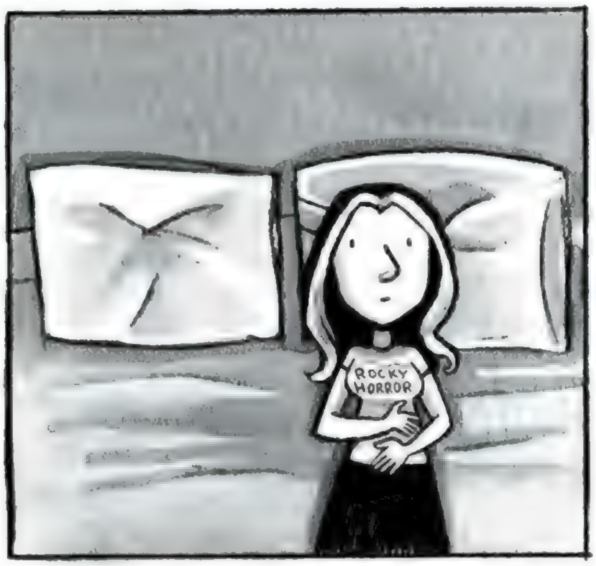

Were you going to go in there and make AWKWARD sexual advances at that guy you like who made out with you at that party?
umm... I was hoping they'd be SEXY advances
...
...
Are you wearing a bodysuit?
intense ↑
It's... what we wear in the future.
... anyway, you shouldn't do it! That guy is a TEASE and a DOUCHE.
That body-suit looks AWESOME

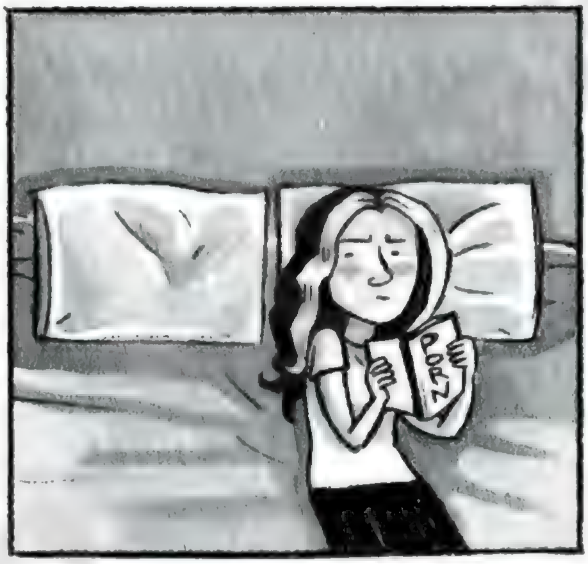

Seriously, it's not worth it, and also, it embarrasses me.
I Knoooooow.
I'm JUST SO FREAKIN' HORNY!
Yeah, I Know, well...
...that's Kinda the other reason I'm here.
MAKE OUT

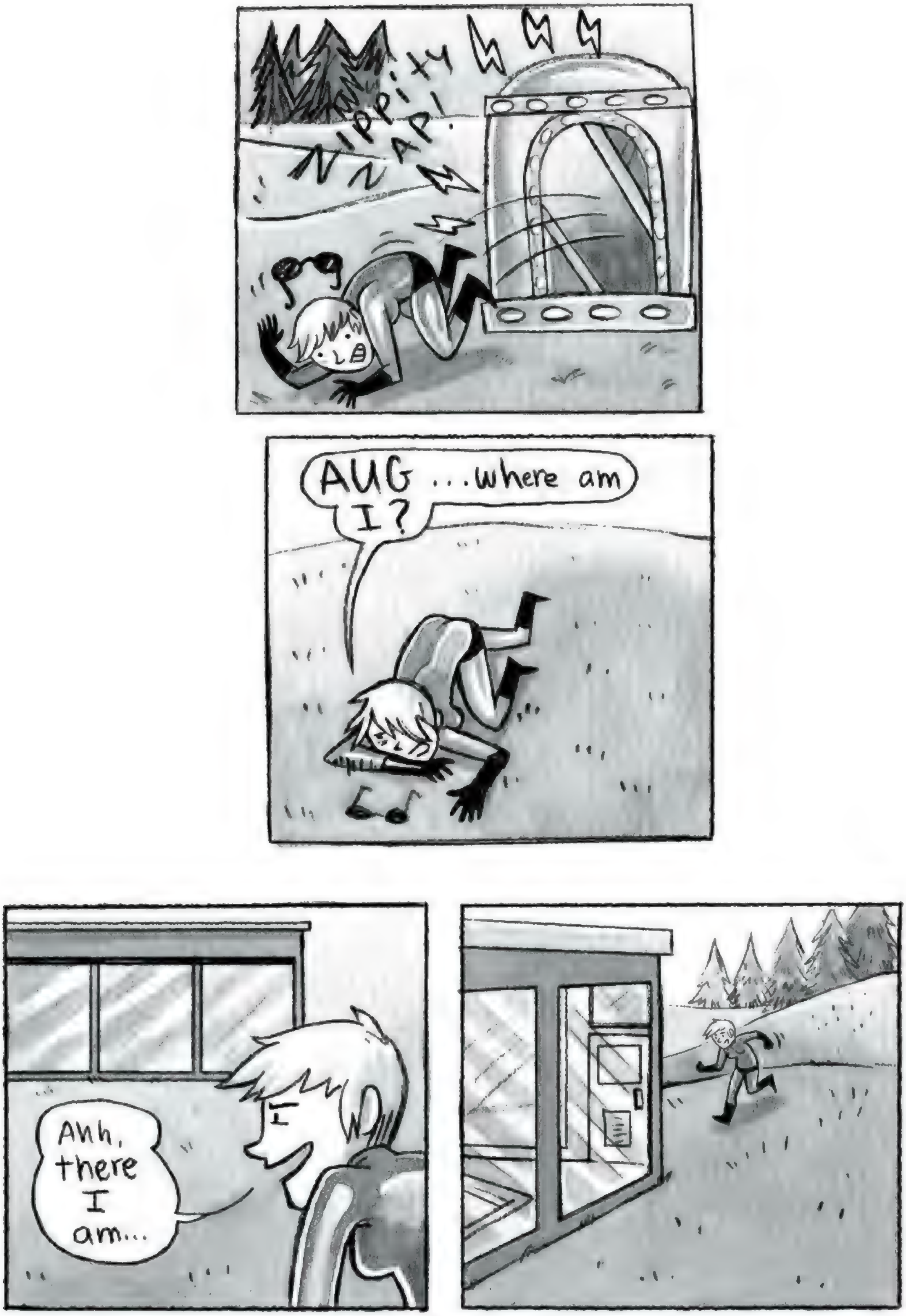

LATER:
m mm mm mm mm mm
mmm
Slobber Slobber
THIS IS AWESOME.
Yeah, it's Pretty Sweet.
I wonder what other sexy adventures I can get into in my past...
None of it feels very sexy at the moment.
Really?! I remember some pretty sexy times!
Yeah...they seem less sexy and more awkward
...
ROCKY HORROR

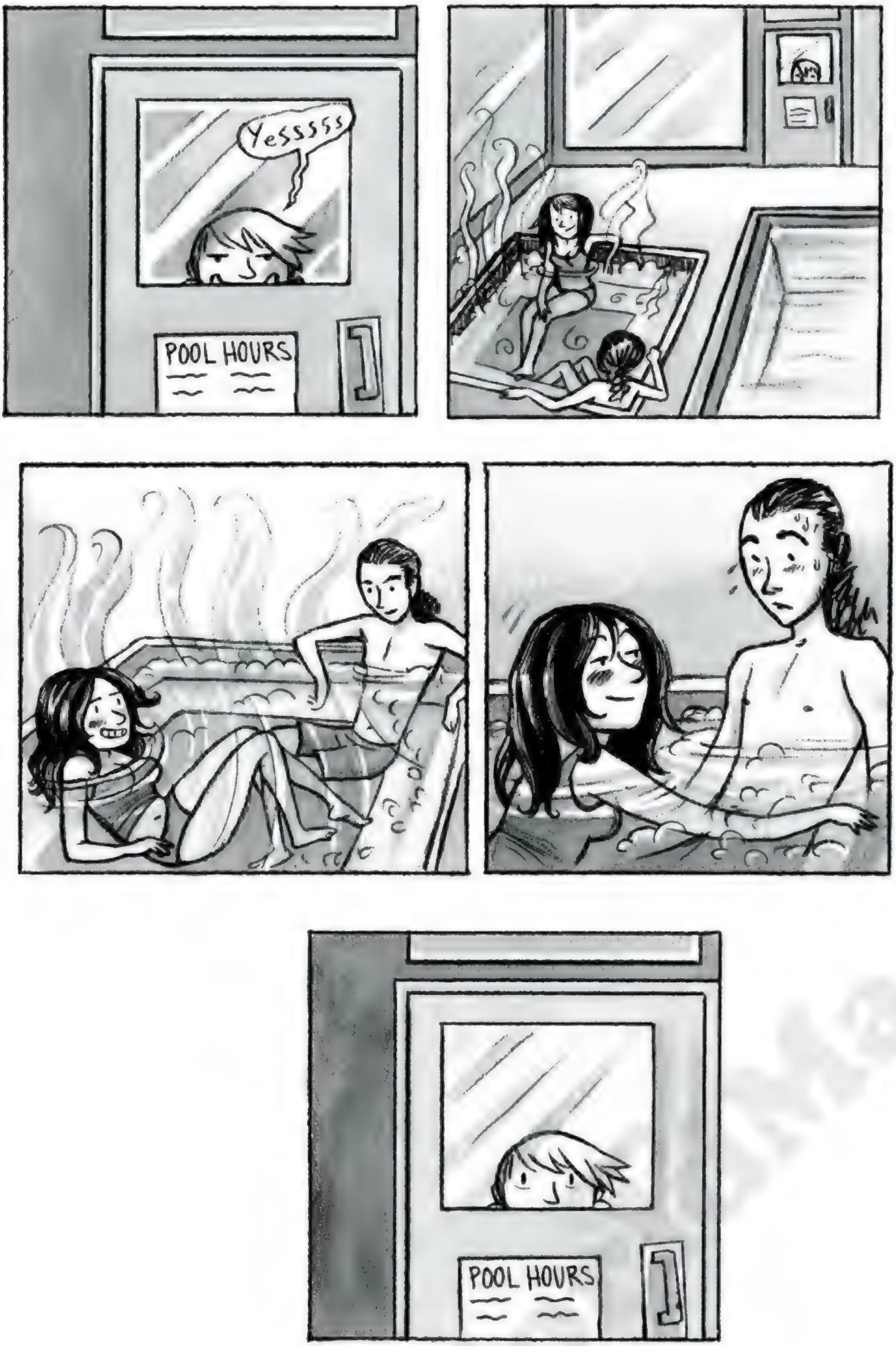

AWW, don't be So down on... ...myself. You have such low Self-esteem.
mmmph.
Someday you will be able to look back on your sexy times and get horny from them!
In high school you didn't even think you could be in a relationship, look at you now!
I still haven't been in a real one.
Don't worry, your future is sexier- but your past is sexy too!
And I'm gonna go MAKE OUT with it!!
GUITAR SOUNDS!

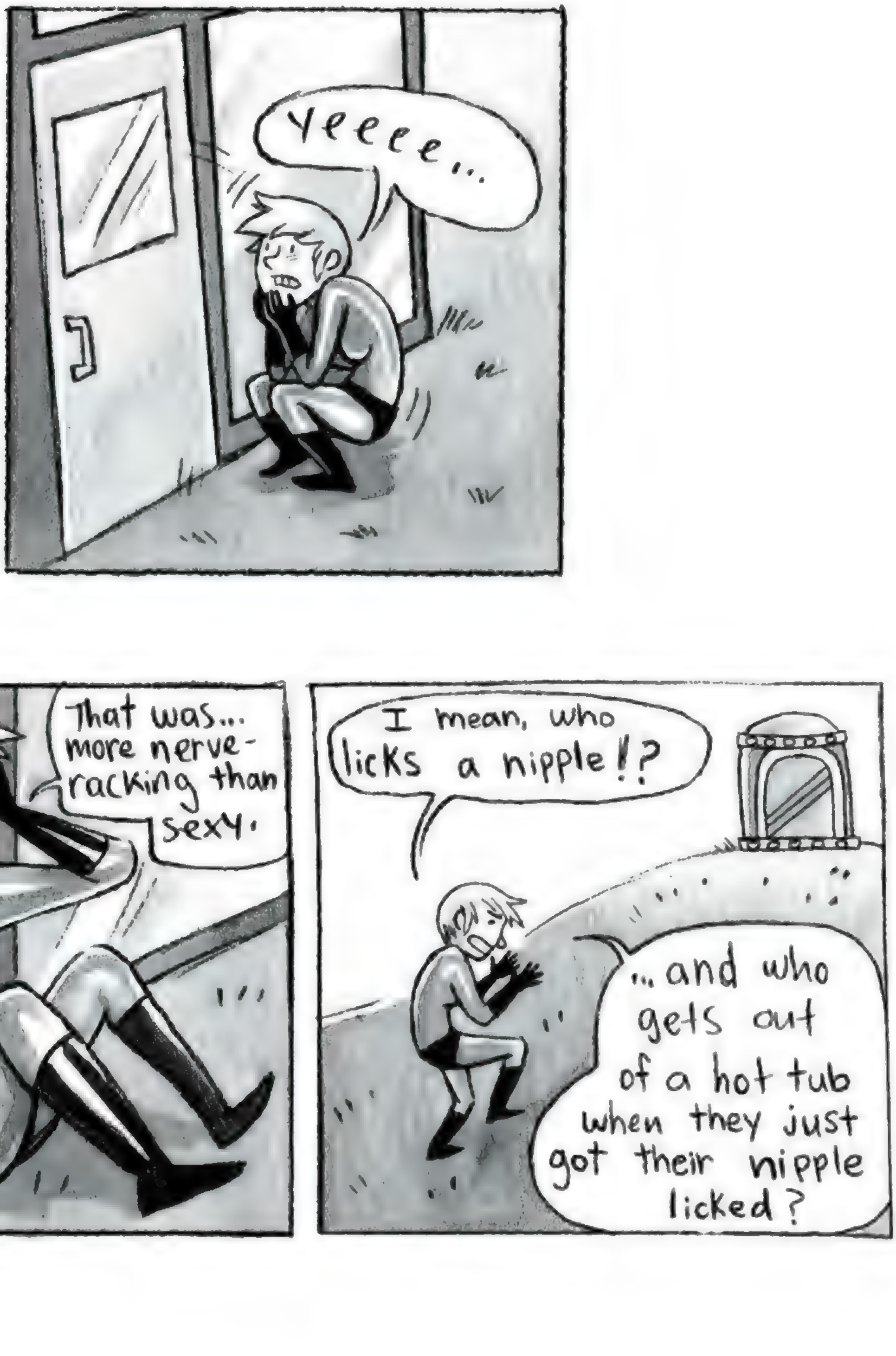

zippity
ZAP!

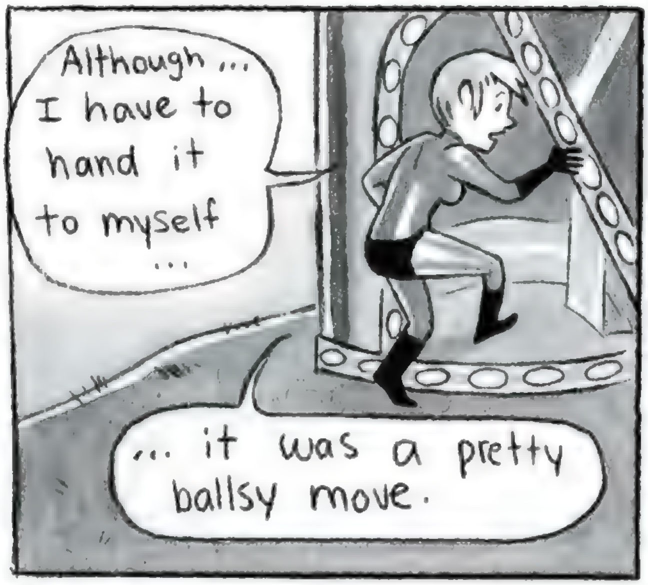

ROCKY HORROR

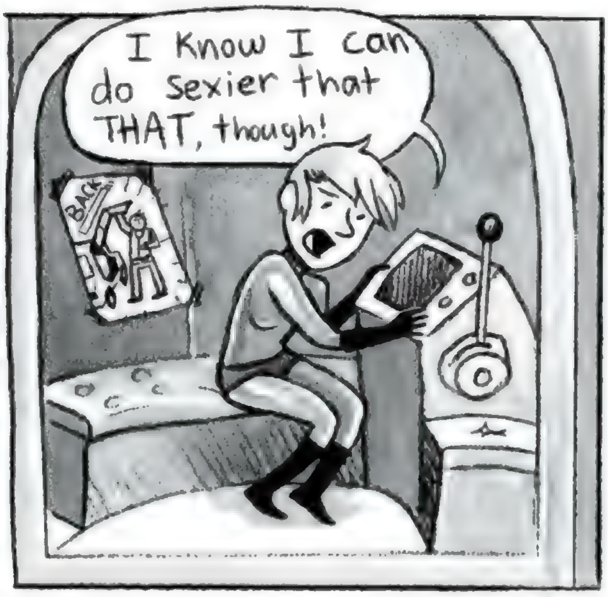

PORN

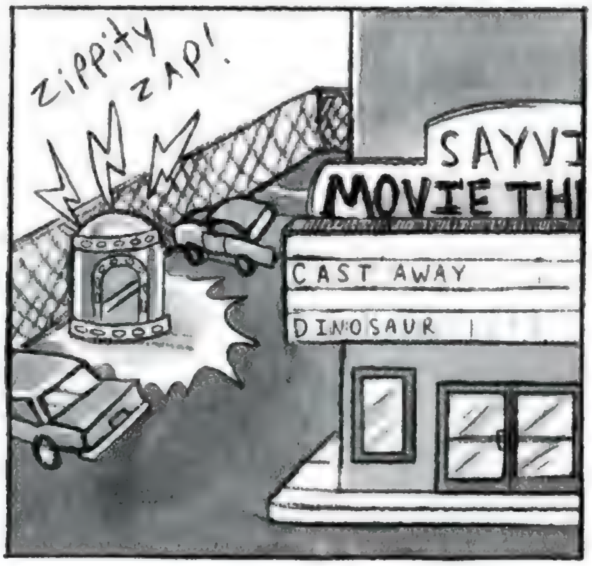

NIPPITY ZAP!
AUG ...where am I?
Ahh, there I am...

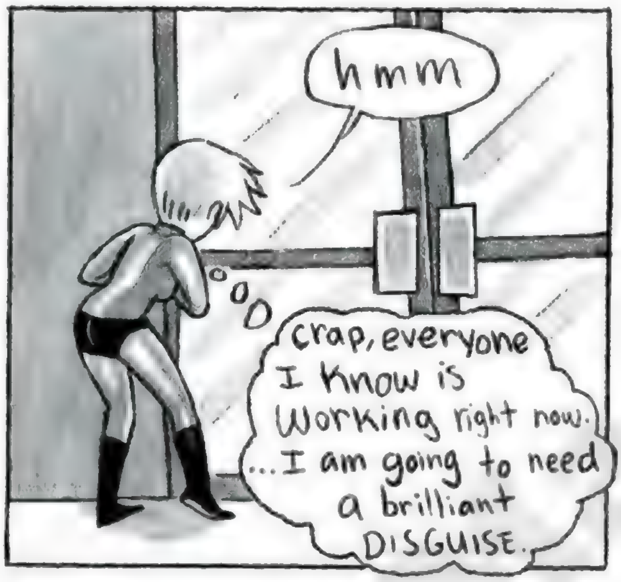

Yesssss
POOL HOURS
POOL HOURS

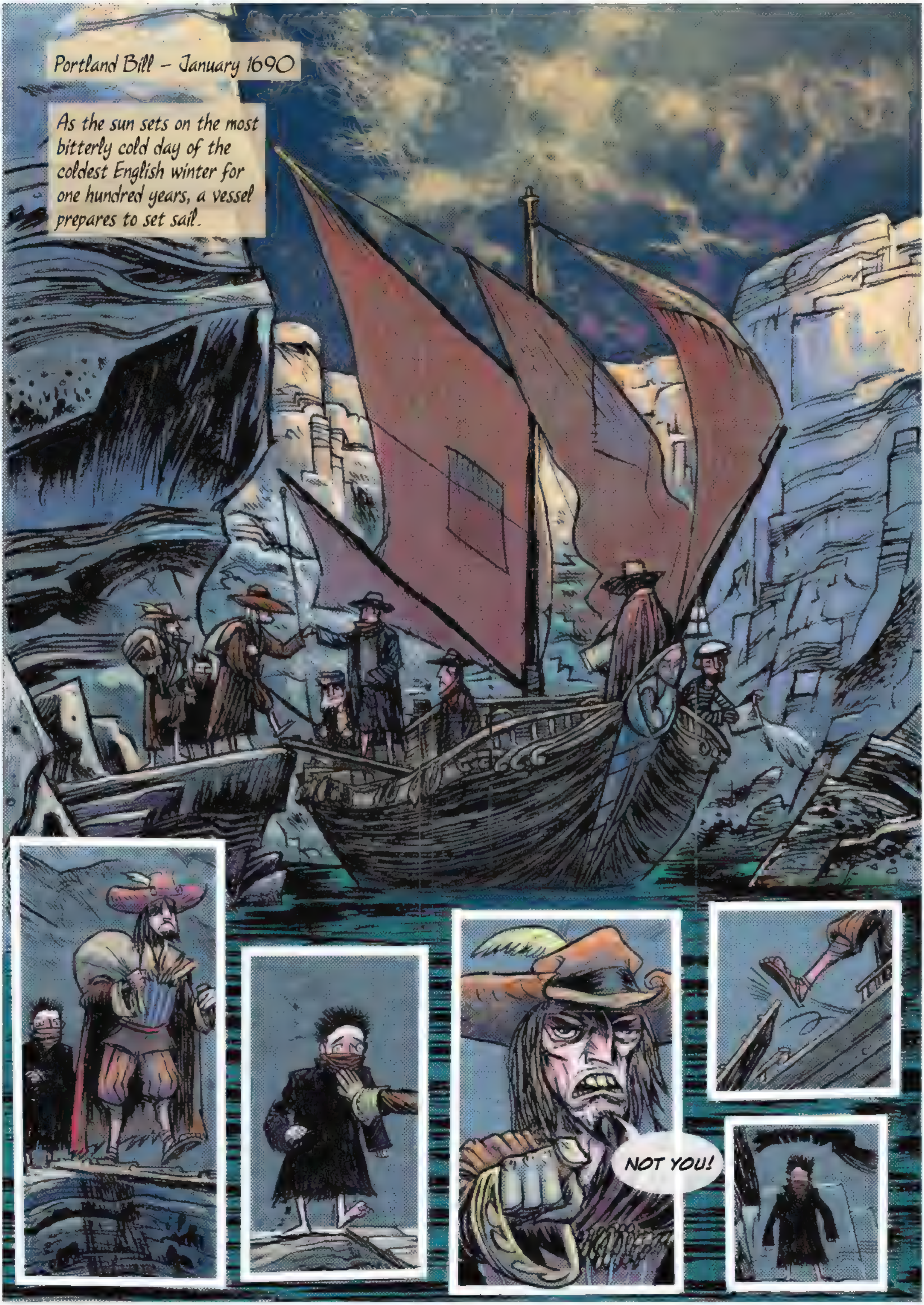

Yeeee...
That was... more nerve-racking than sexy.
I mean, who licks a nipple!?
...and who gets out of a hot tub when they just got their nipple licked?

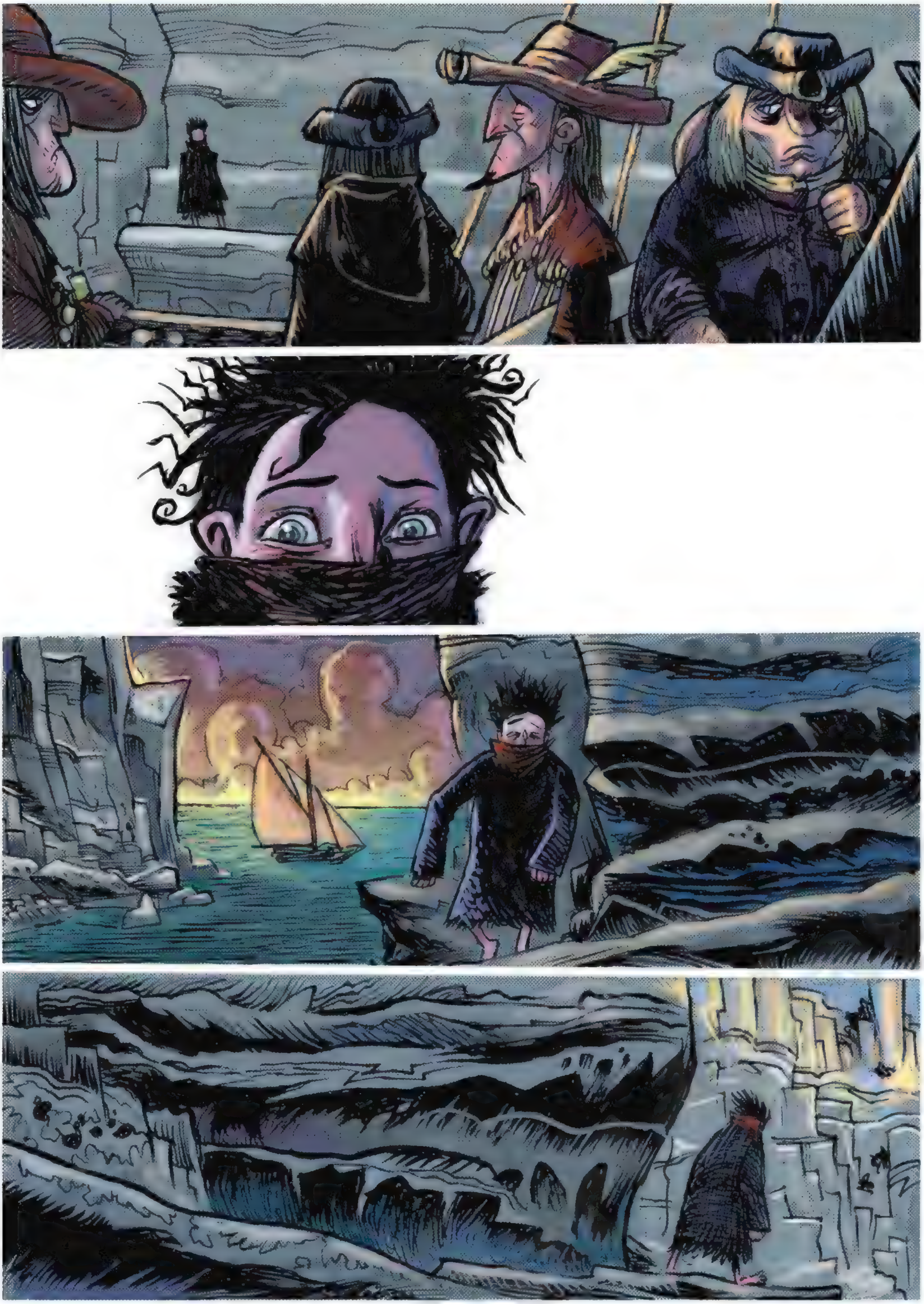

Although ... I have to hand it to myself ...
... it was a pretty ballsy move.

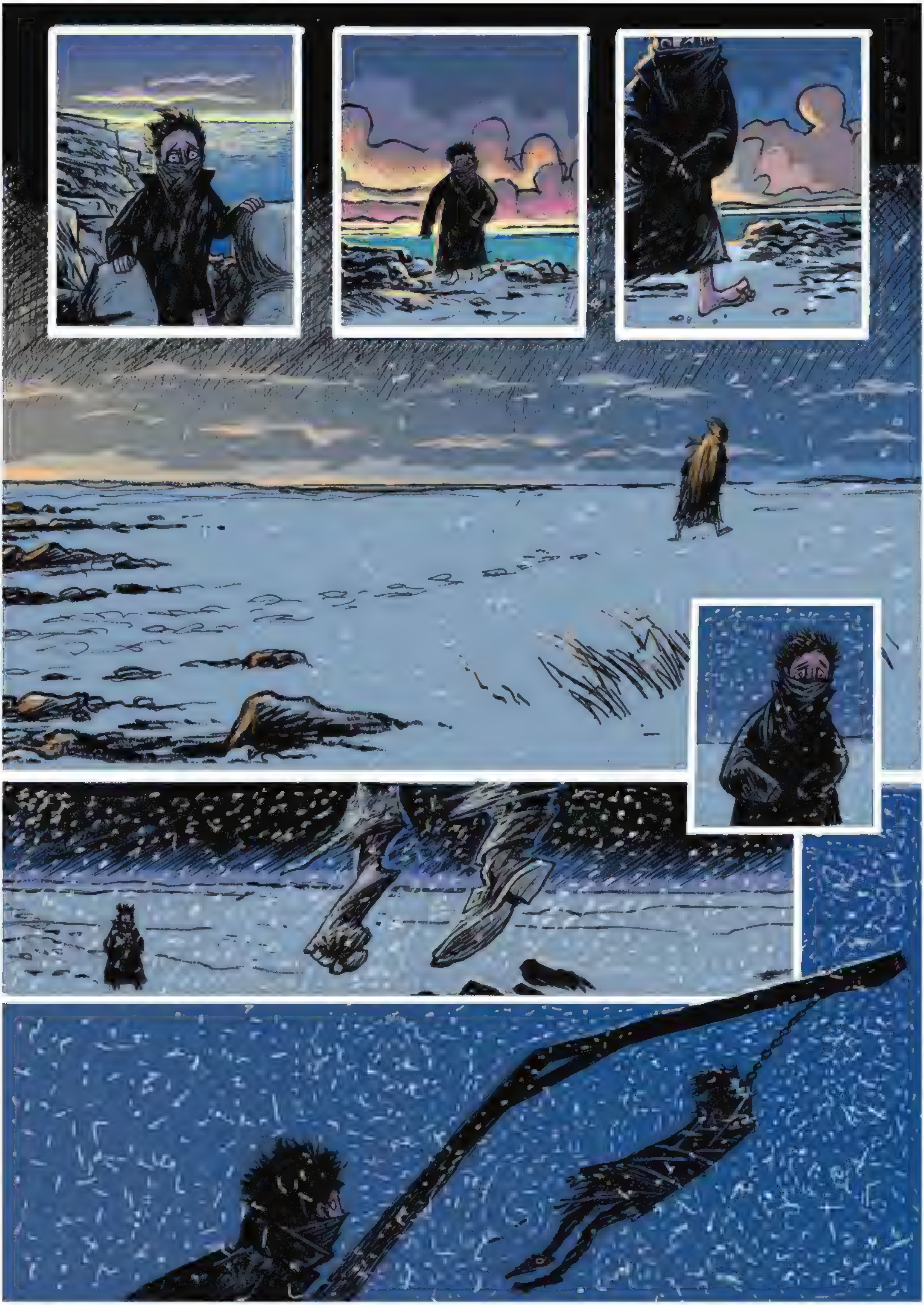

I know I can do sexier that THAT, though!
BACK

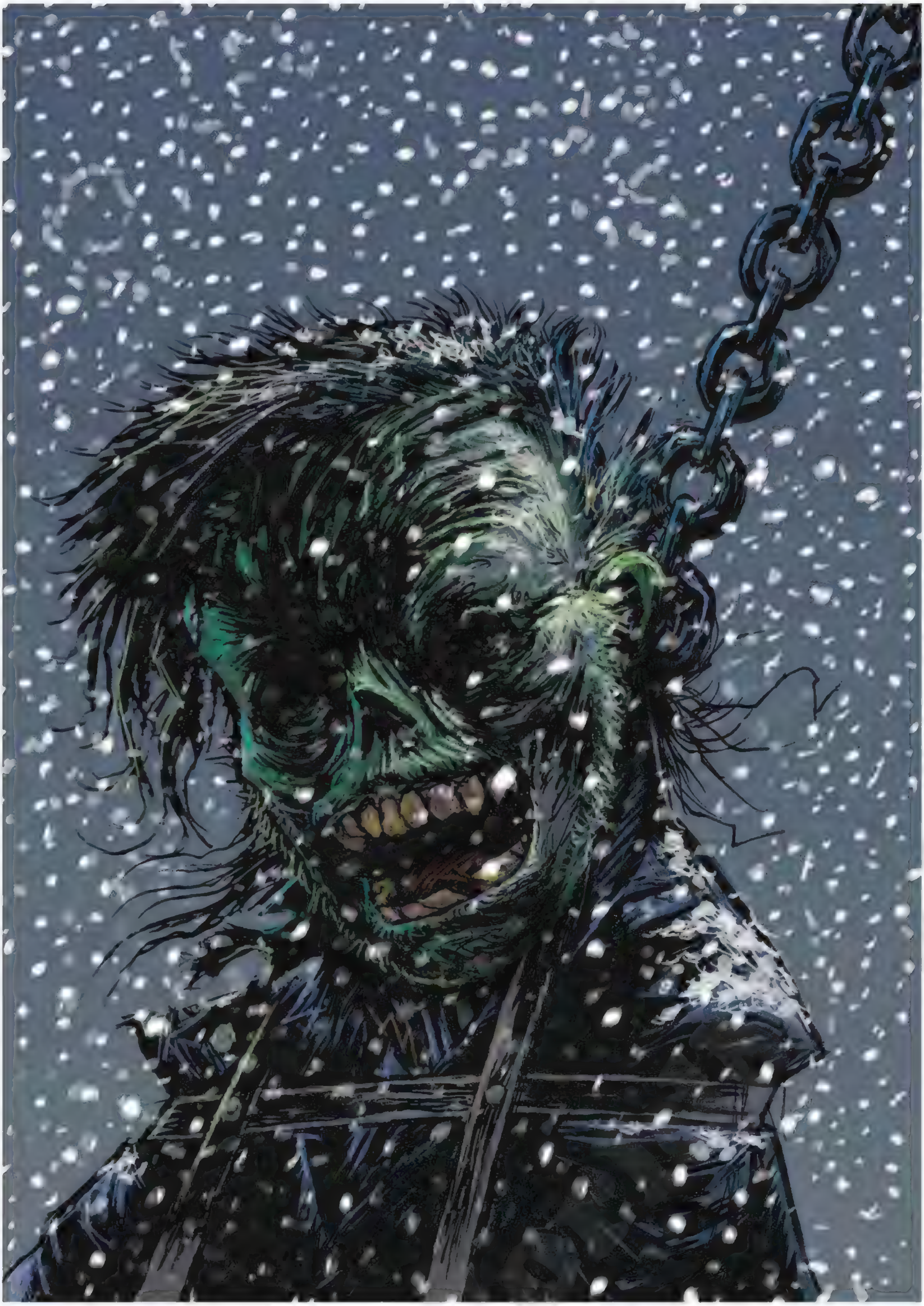

zippity zAP!
SAYVI
MOVIE TH
CAST AWAY
DINOSAUR

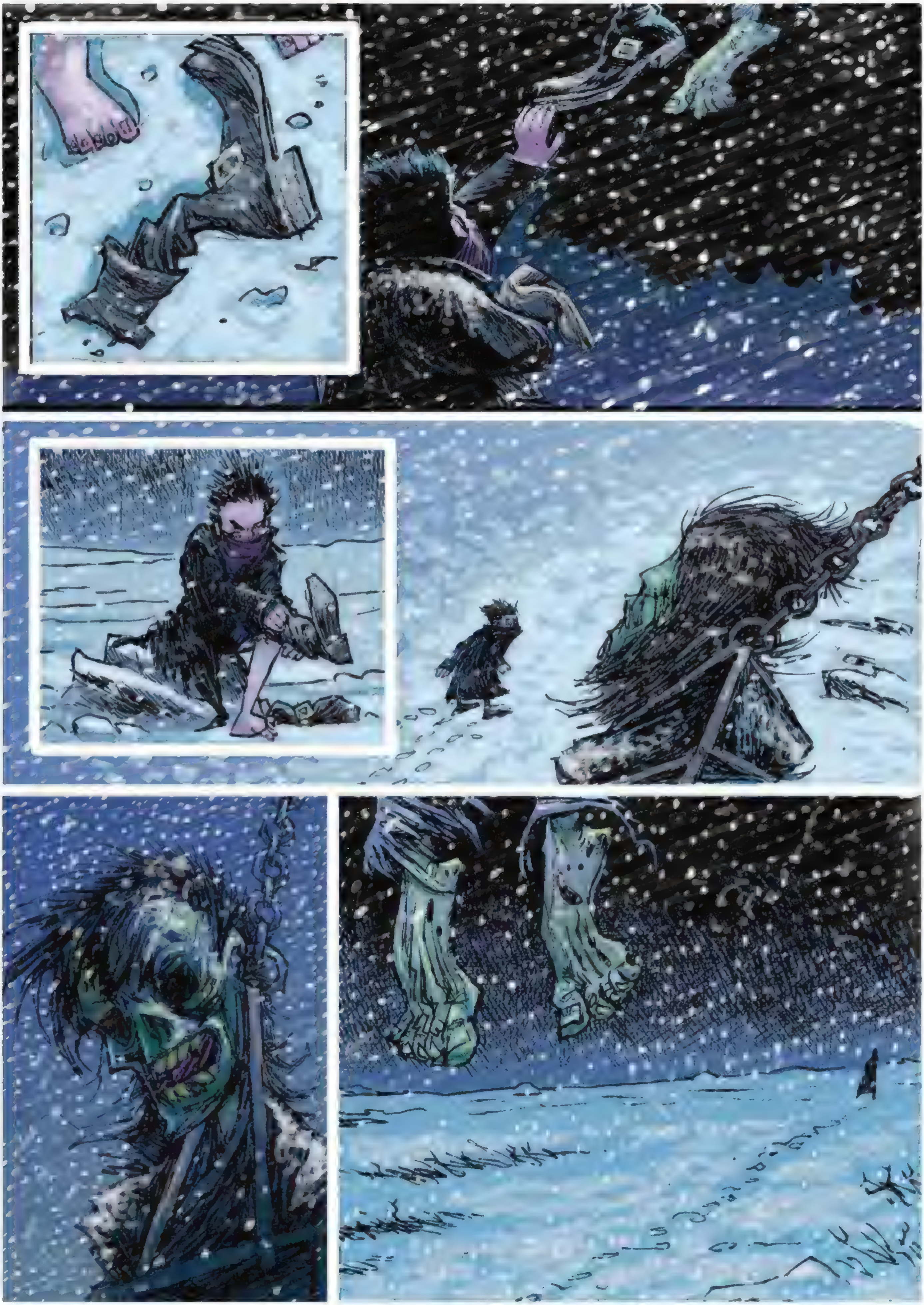

hmm
crap, everyone I know is working right now. ...I am going to need a brilliant DISGUISE.

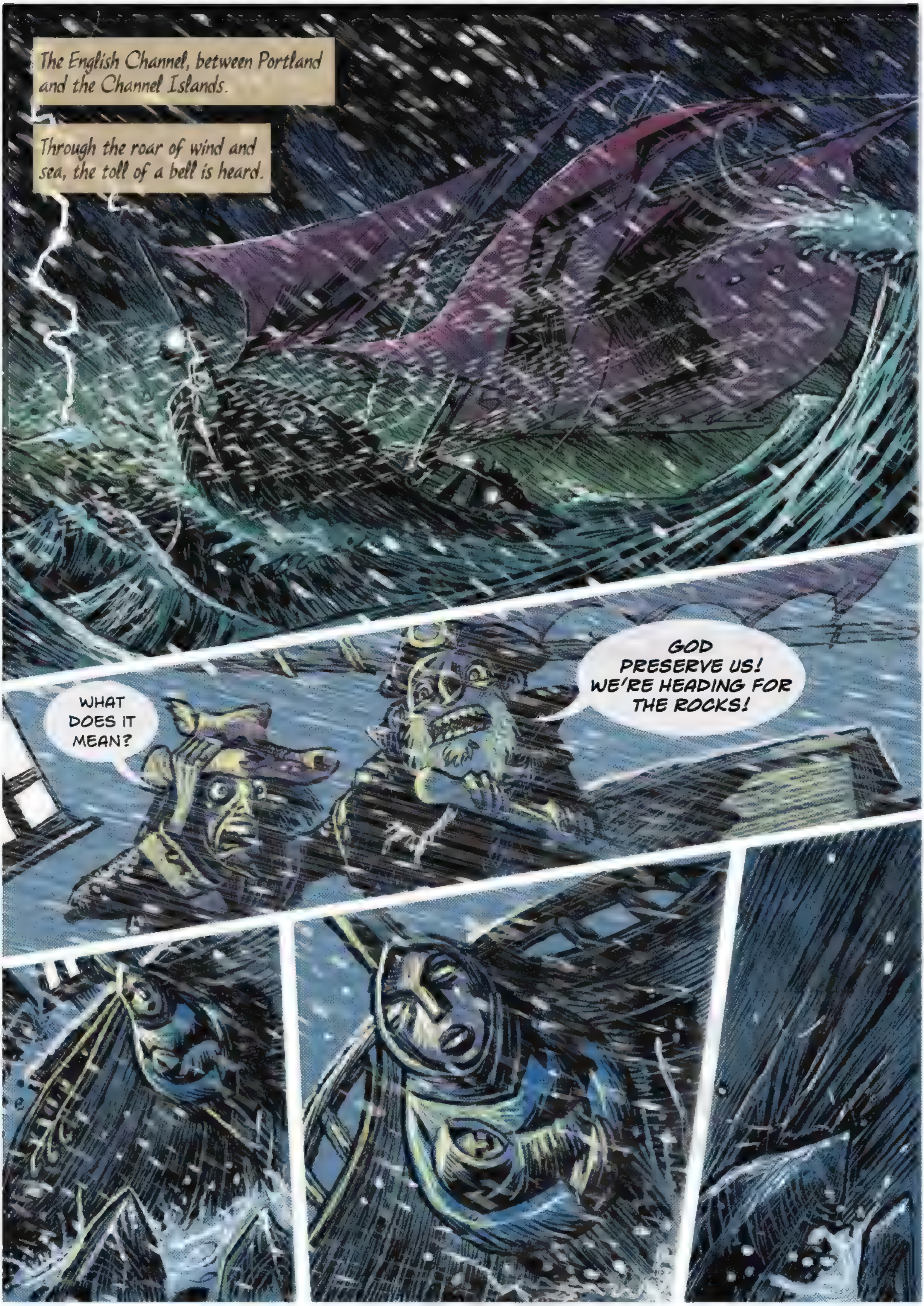

Portland Bill – January 1690
As the sun sets on the most bitterly cold day of the coldest English winter for one hundred years, a vessel prepares to set sail.
NOT YOU!

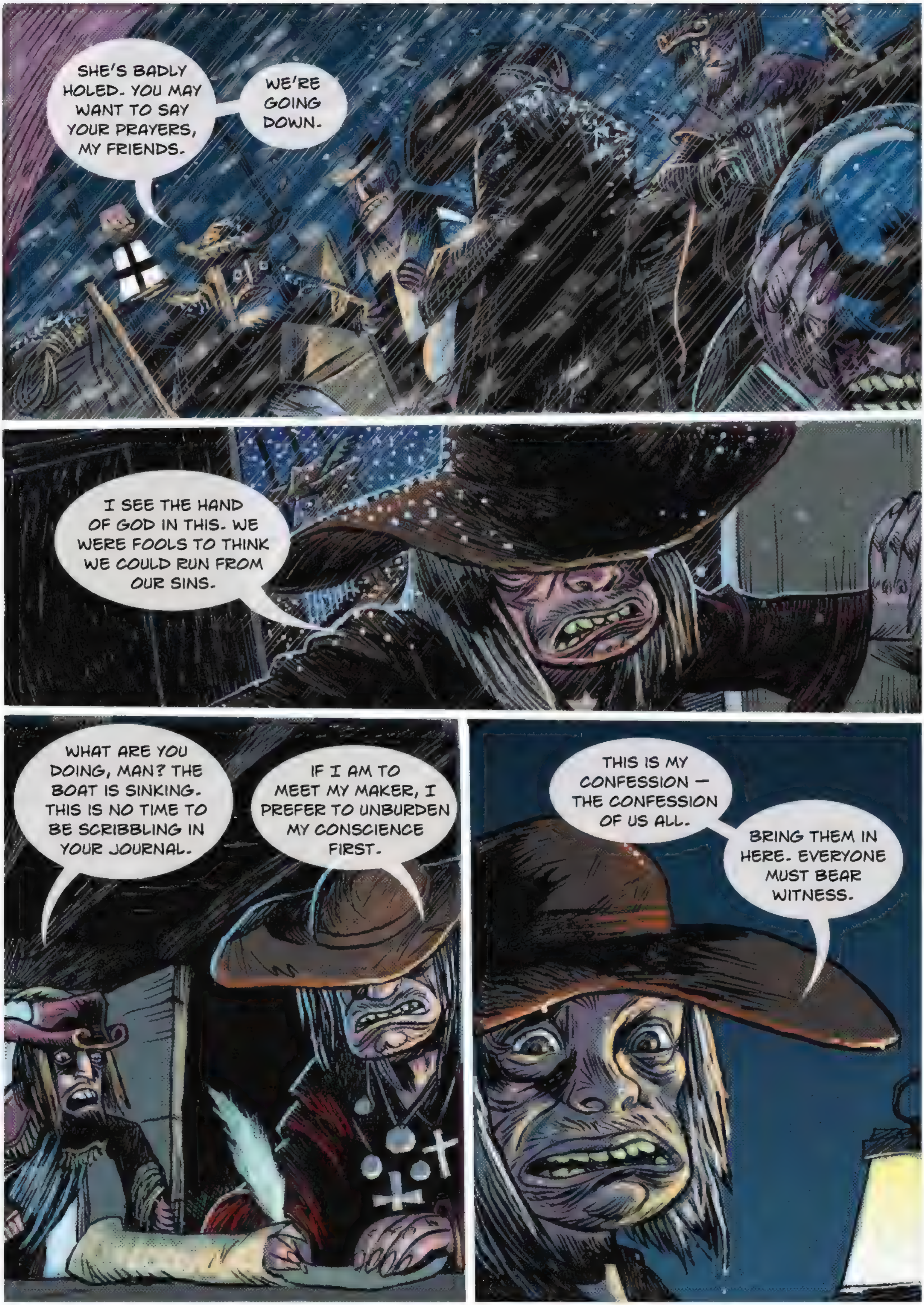


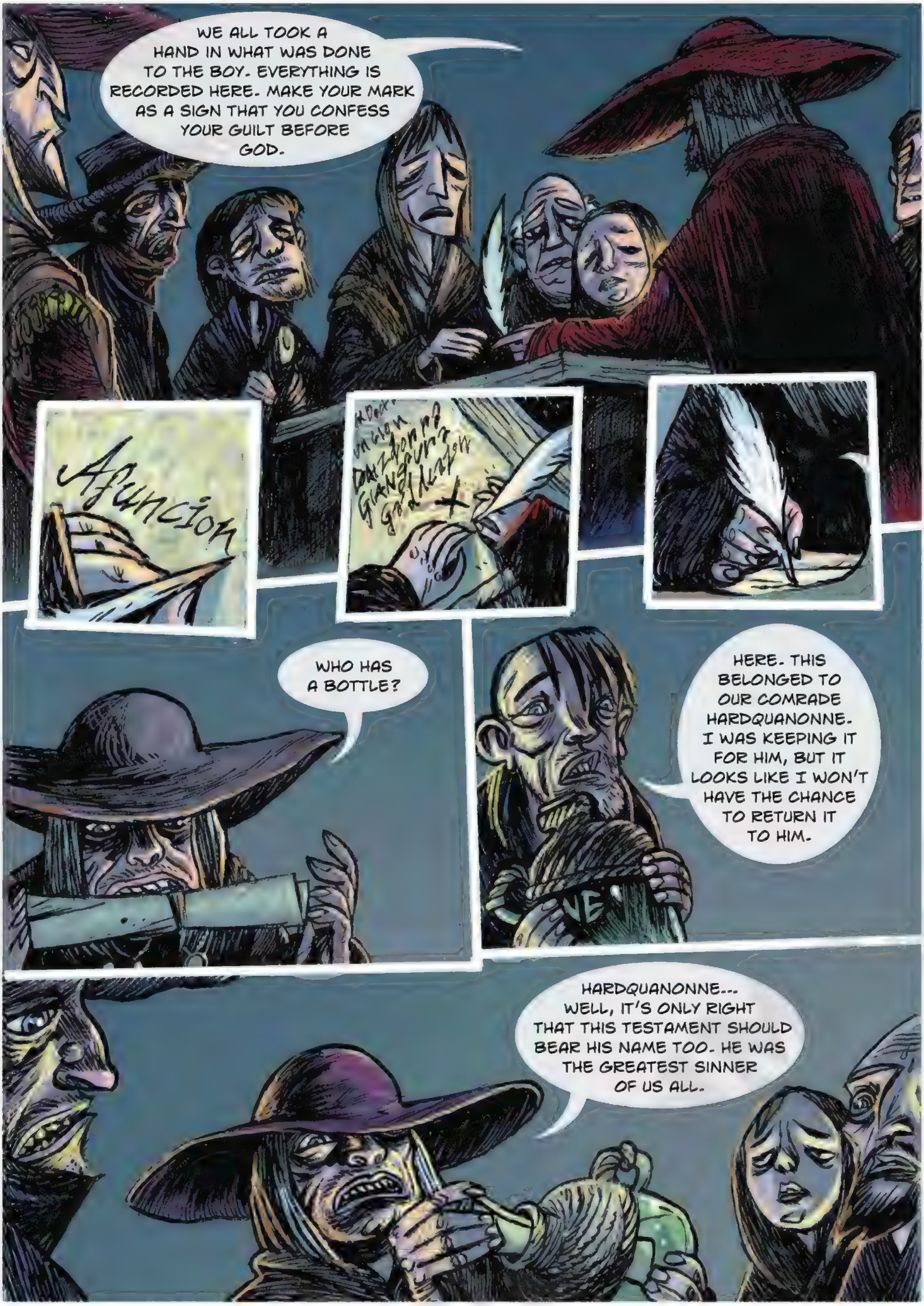


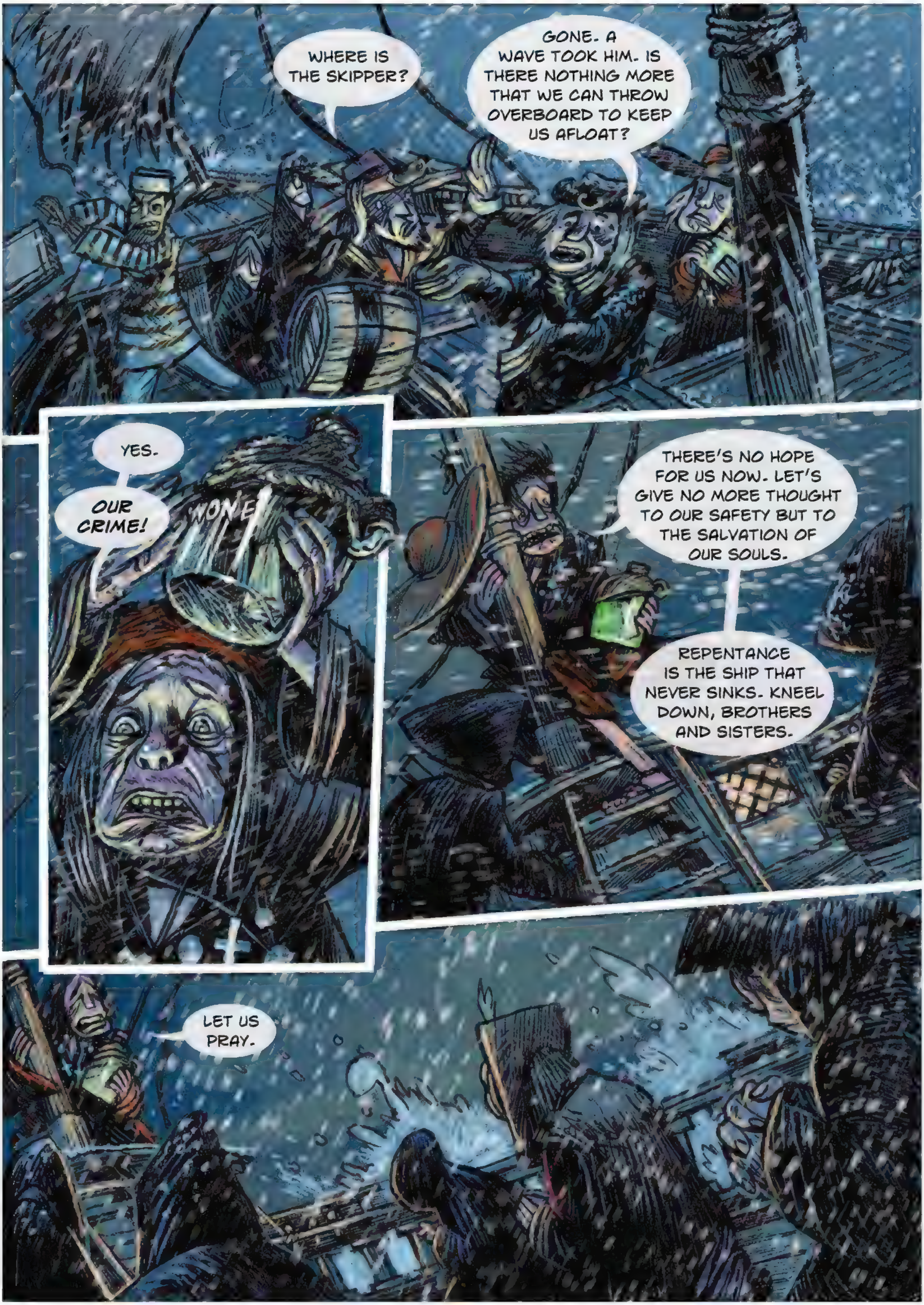


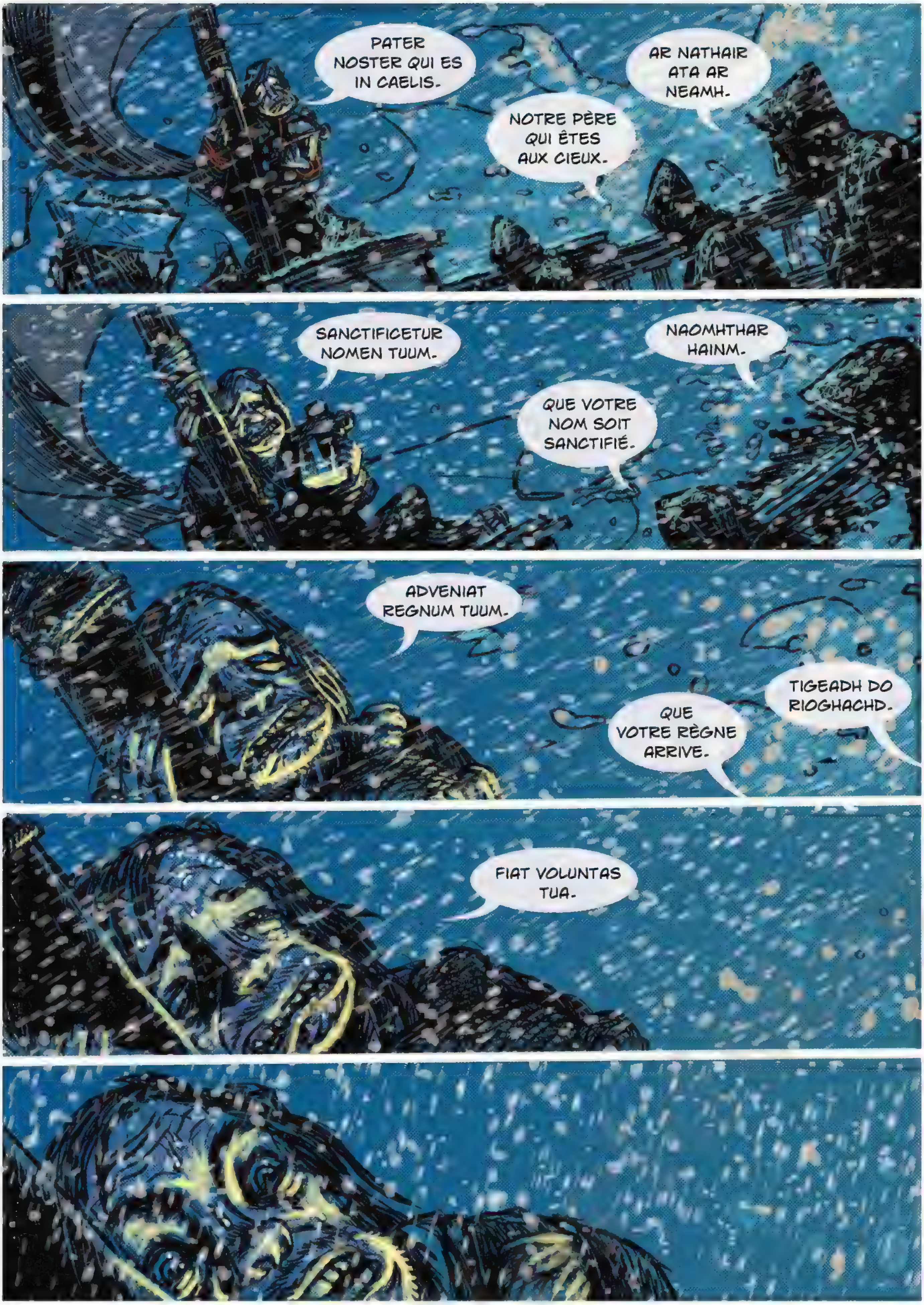


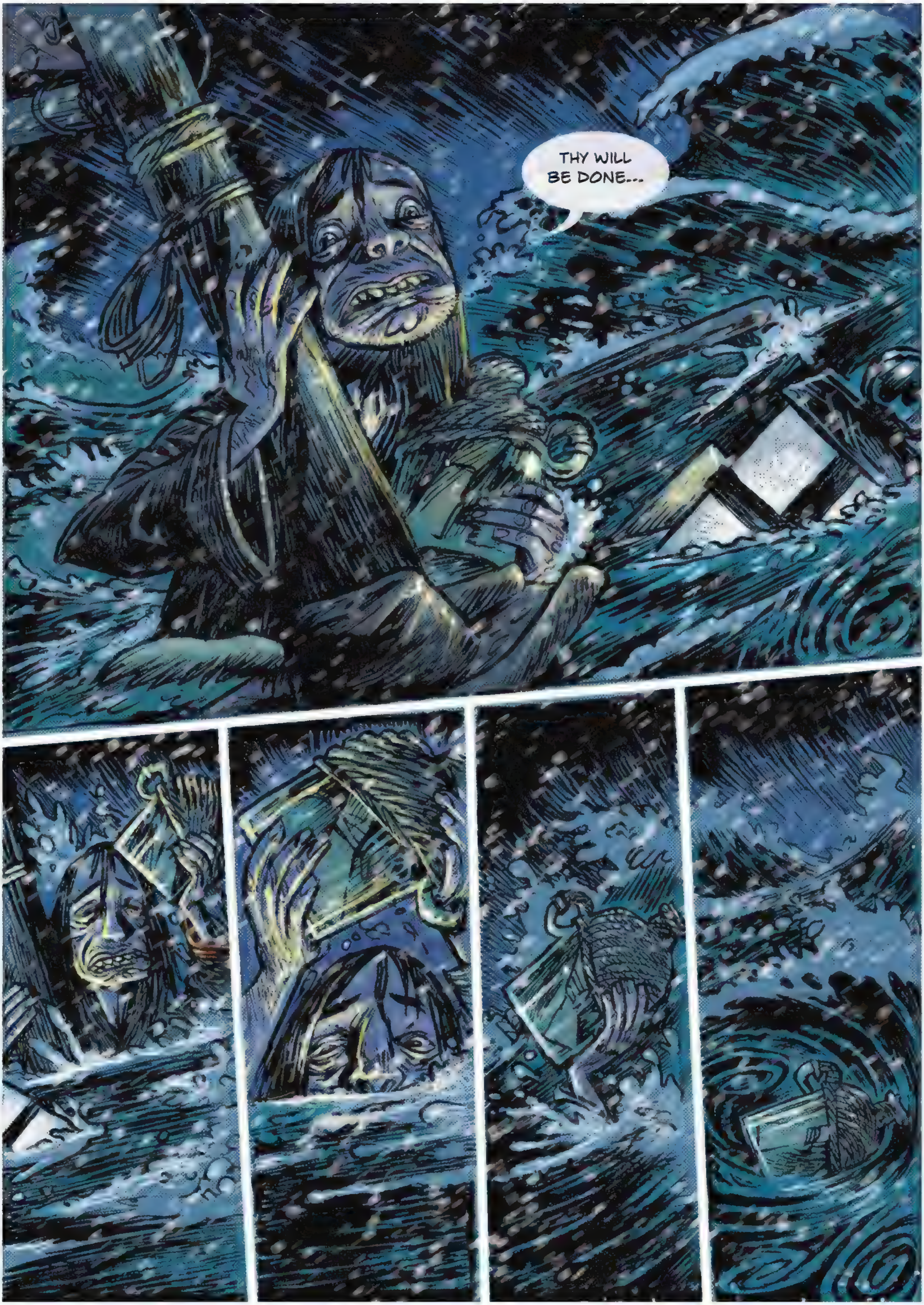

The English Channel, between Portland and the Channel Islands.
Through the roar of wind and sea, the toll of a bell is heard.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
GOD PRESERVE US! WE'RE HEADING FOR THE ROCKS!

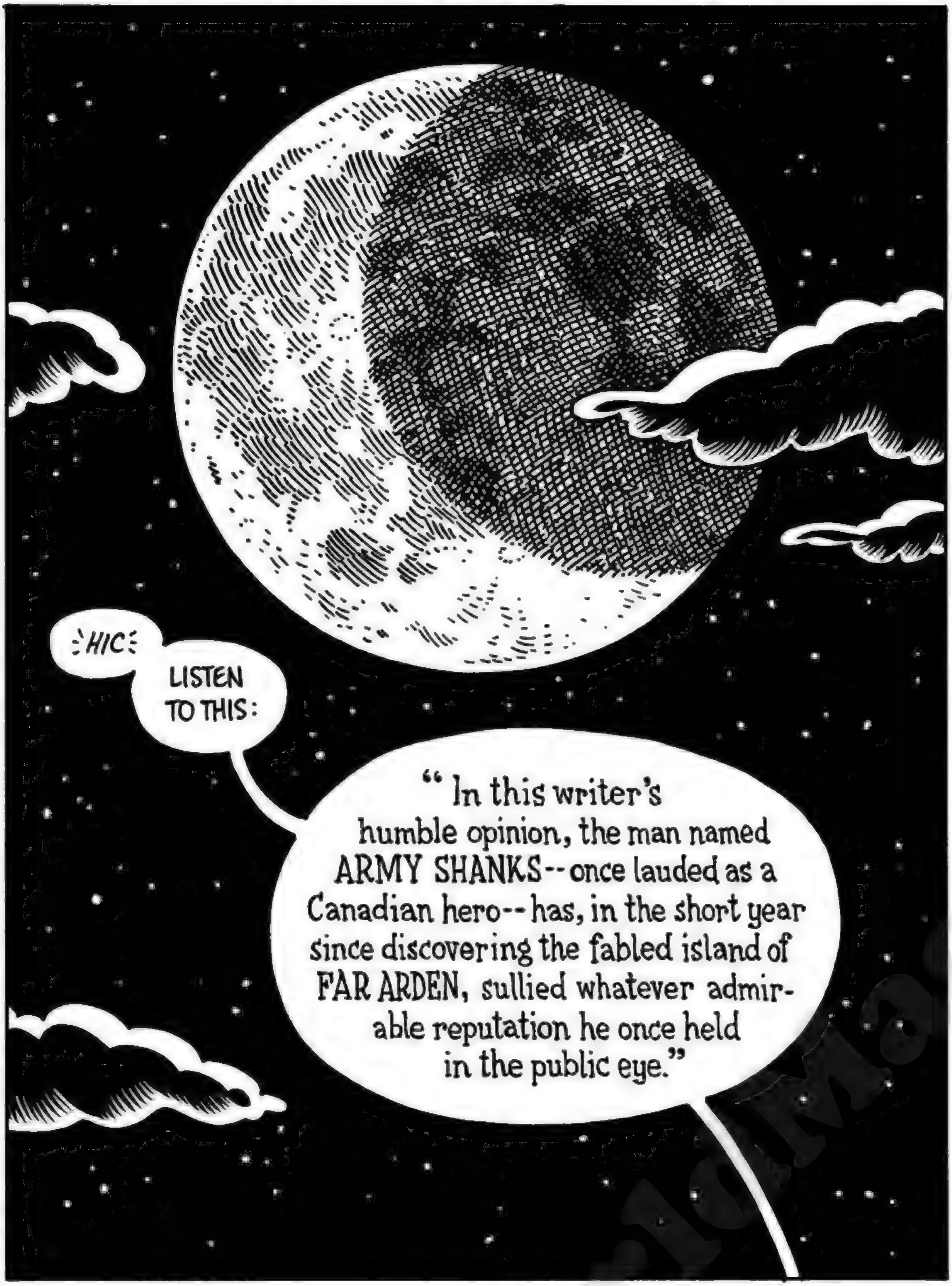

SHE'S BADLY HOLED. YOU MAY WANT TO SAY YOUR PRAYERS, MY FRIENDS.
WE'RE GOING DOWN.
I SEE THE HAND OF GOD IN THIS. WE WERE FOOLS TO THINK WE COULD RUN FROM OUR SINS.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MAN? THE BOAT IS SINKING. THIS IS NO TIME TO BE SCRIBBLING IN YOUR JOURNAL.
IF I AM TO MEET MY MAKER, I PREFER TO UNBURDEN MY CONSCIENCE FIRST.
THIS IS MY CONFESSION — THE CONFESSION OF US ALL.
BRING THEM IN HERE. EVERYONE MUST BEAR WITNESS.


WE ALL TOOK A HAND IN WHAT WAS DONE TO THE BOY. EVERYTHING IS RECORDED HERE. MAKE YOUR MARK AS A SIGN THAT YOU CONFESS YOUR GUILT BEFORE GOD.
Aſuncion
WHO HAS A BOTTLE?
HERE. THIS BELONGED TO OUR COMRADE HARDQUANONNE. I WAS KEEPING IT FOR HIM, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE I WON'T HAVE THE CHANCE TO RETURN IT TO HIM.
VE
HARDQUANONNE... WELL, IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT THIS TESTAMENT SHOULD BEAR HIS NAME TOO. HE WAS THE GREATEST SINNER OF US ALL.

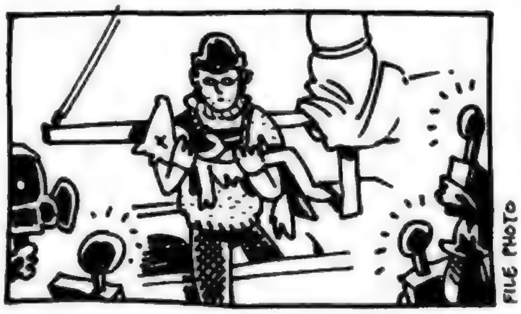

WHERE IS THE SKIPPER?
GONE. A WAVE TOOK HIM. IS THERE NOTHING MORE THAT WE CAN THROW OVERBOARD TO KEEP US AFLOAT?
YES.
OUR CRIME!
NONE
THERE'S NO HOPE FOR US NOW. LET'S GIVE NO MORE THOUGHT TO OUR SAFETY BUT TO THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS.
REPENTANCE IS THE SHIP THAT NEVER SINKS. KNEEL DOWN, BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
LET US PRAY.


PATER NOSTER QUI ES IN CAELIS.
NOTRE PÈRE QUI ÊTES AUX CIEUX.
AR NATHAIR ATA AR NEAMH.
SANCTIFICETUR NOMEN TUUM.
QUE VOTRE NOM SOIT SANCTIFIÉ.
NAOMHTHAR HAINM.
ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM.
QUE VOTRE RÈGNE ARRIVE.
TIGEADH DO RIOGHACHD.
FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA.

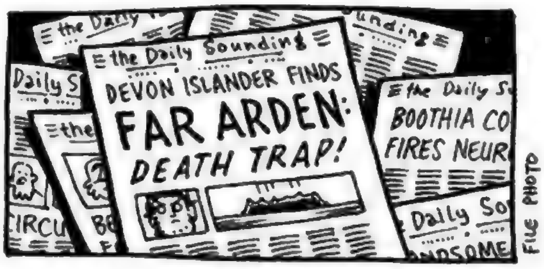

THY WILL BE DONE...


HIC
LISTEN TO THIS:
" In this writer's humble opinion, the man named ARMY SHANKS--once lauded as a Canadian hero--has, in the short year since discovering the fabled island of FAR ARDEN, sullied whatever admirable reputation he once held in the public eye."

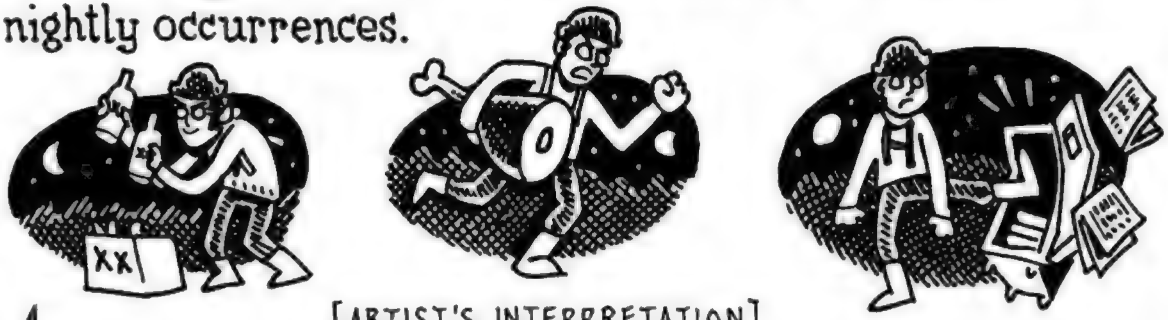
"While no one blames Mr. Shanks for mourning the loss of his nephew, Alistair...



"...or the other lives lost (which can be read about at great length in our previous articles on the subject)...

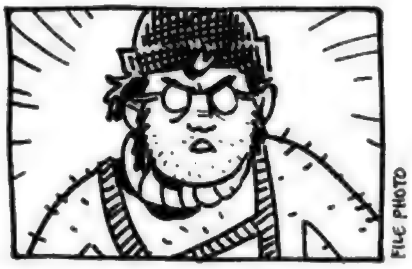

the Daily Sounding
DEVON ISLANDER FINDS
FAR ARDEN:
DEATH TRAP!
the Daily S
BOOTHIA CO
FIRES NEUR
Daily So
NDSOME
Daily S
CIRCU
FILE PHOTO

"...the Devon Island public simply cannot stand the depraved acts he has engineered since the Far Arden tragedy. *Scotch raids, meat looting,* and even *newsstand break-ins* are now near nightly occurrences.

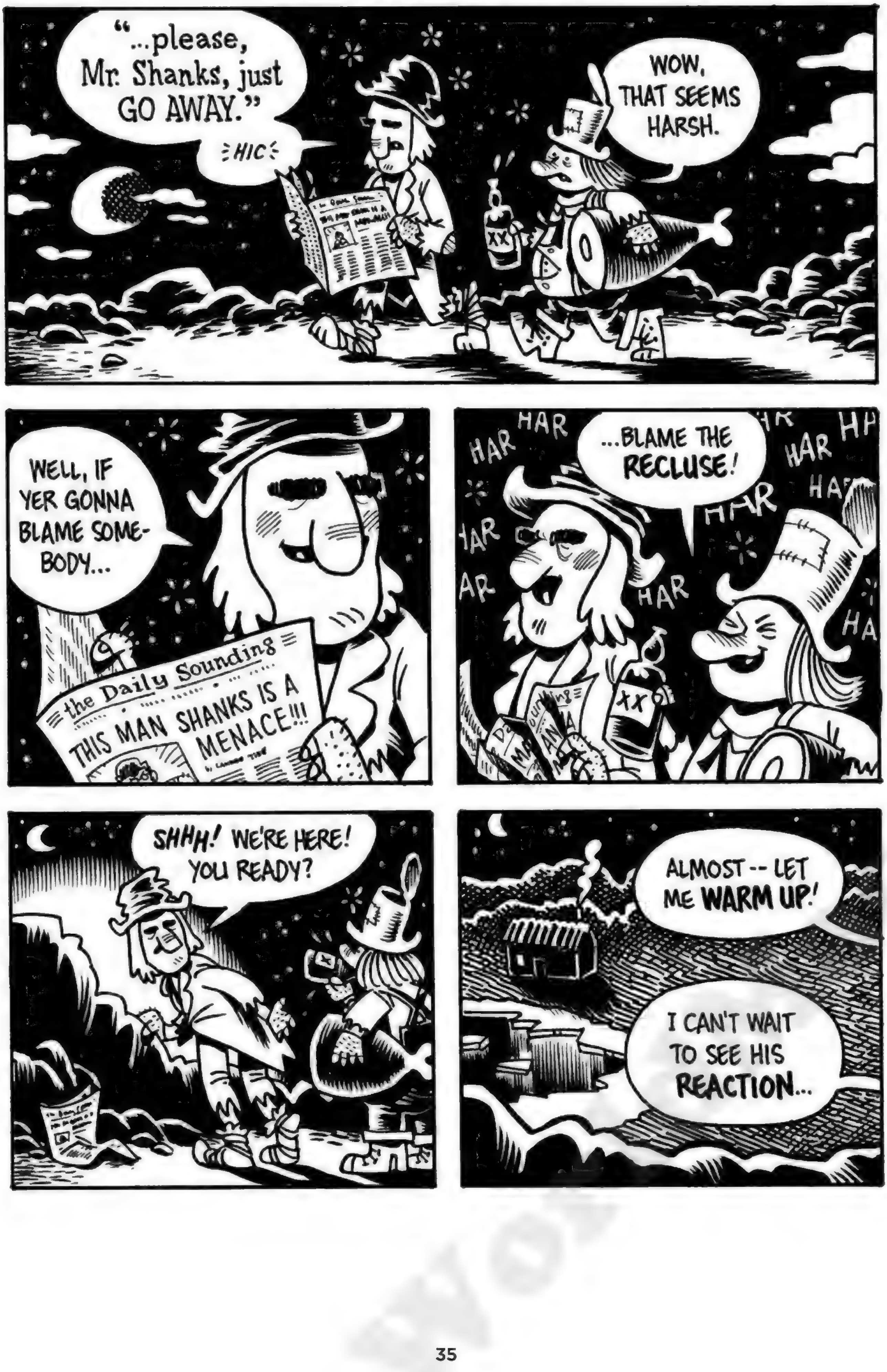


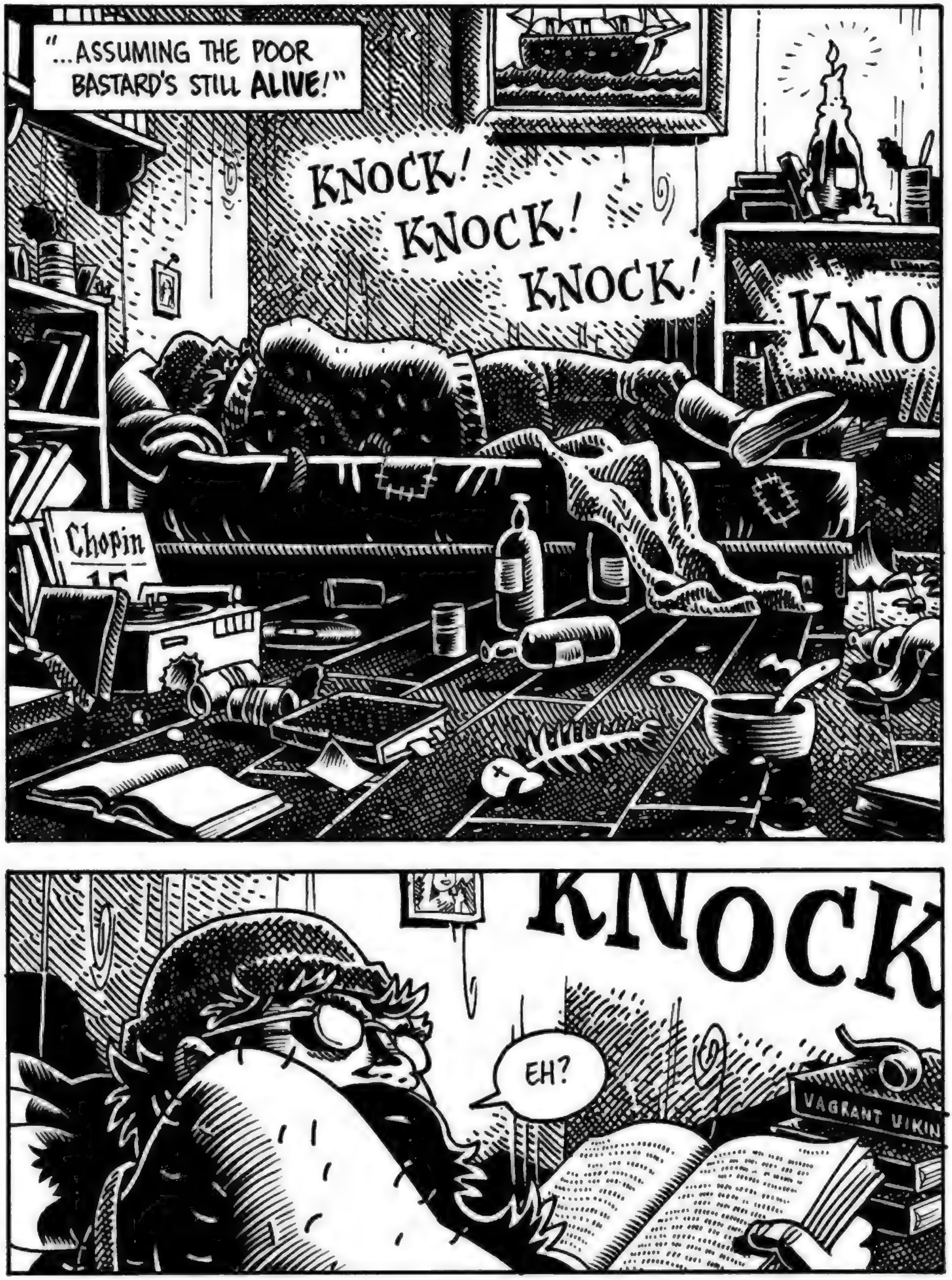
[ARTIST'S INTERPRETATION]

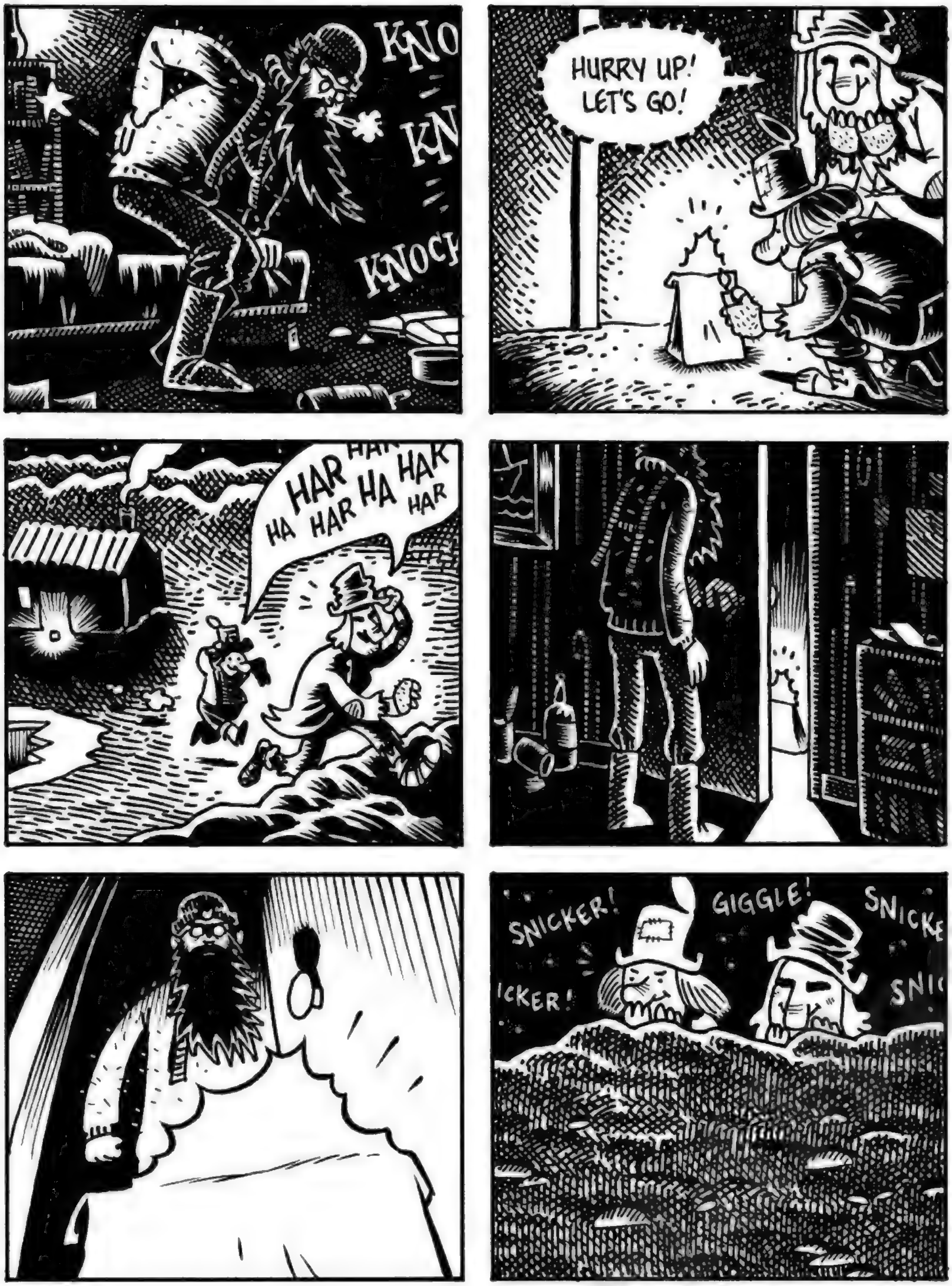
"And while critics point out that the man himself has never been caught in the act, it is clear to this writer that a ship as aimless and dented as Army Shanks -- whether guilty of these offenses or not -- is a ship we don't want in our fair arctic port.

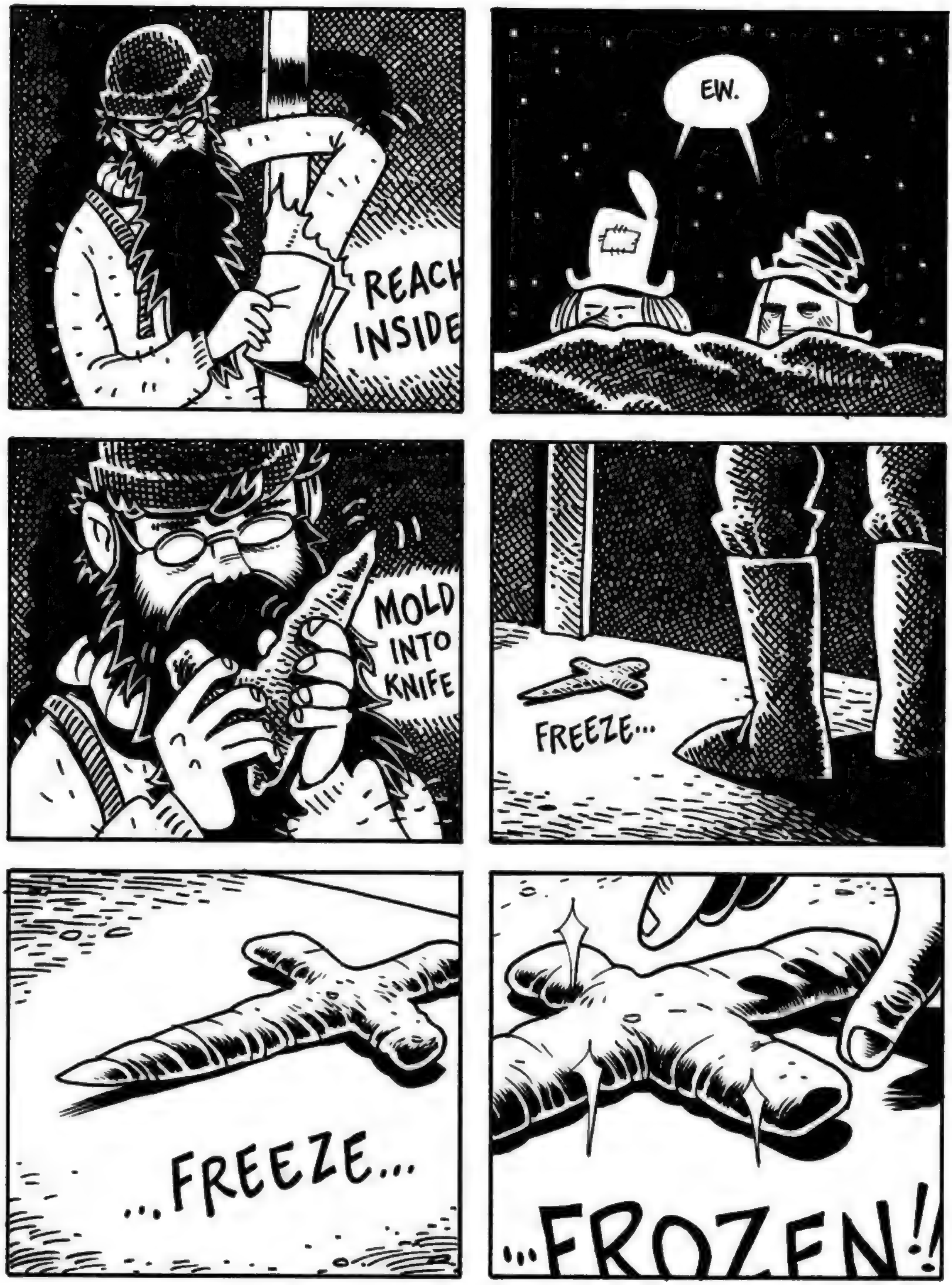


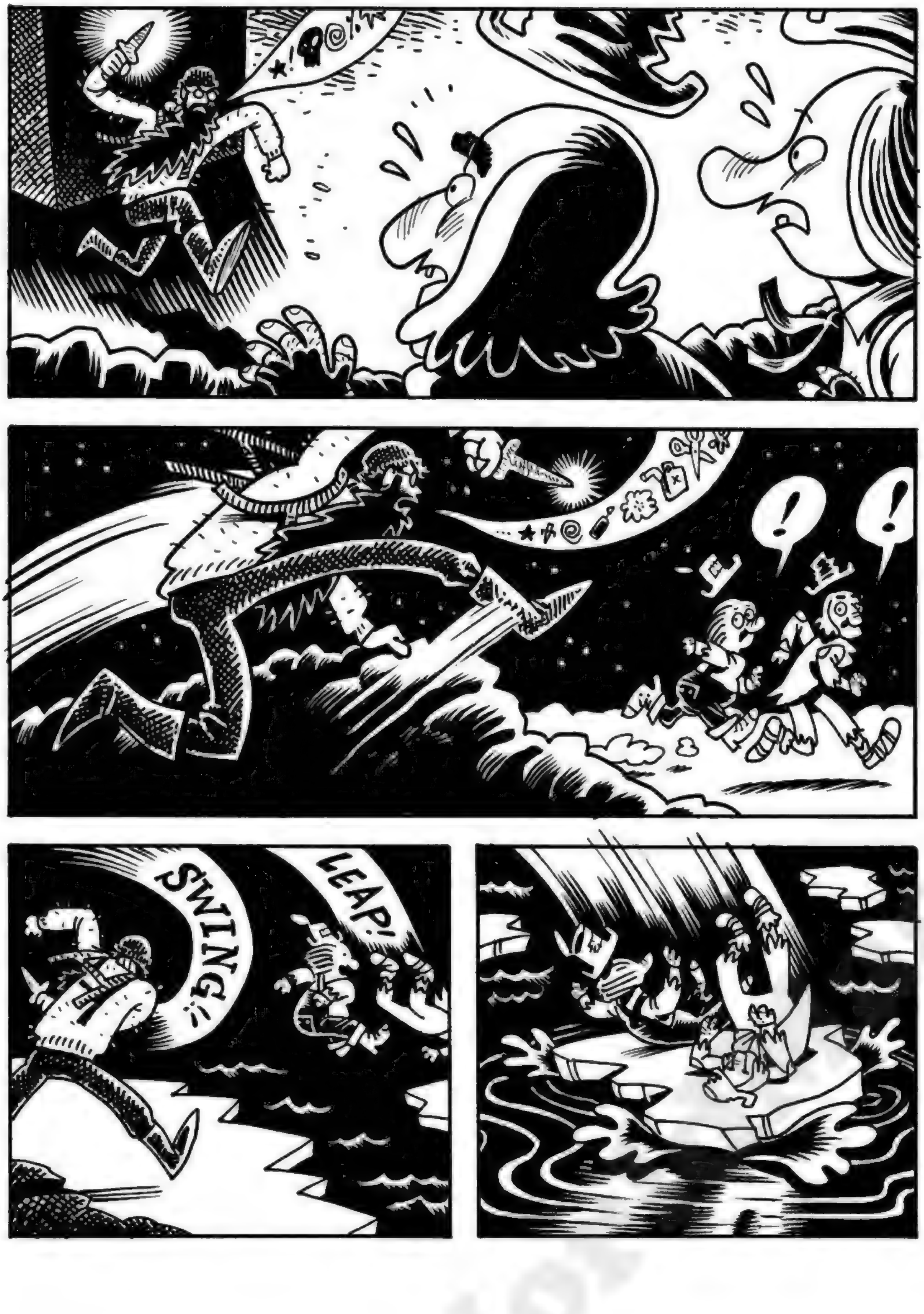
"Which is why this writer does not hesitate to say to our community's fallen hero: ..."

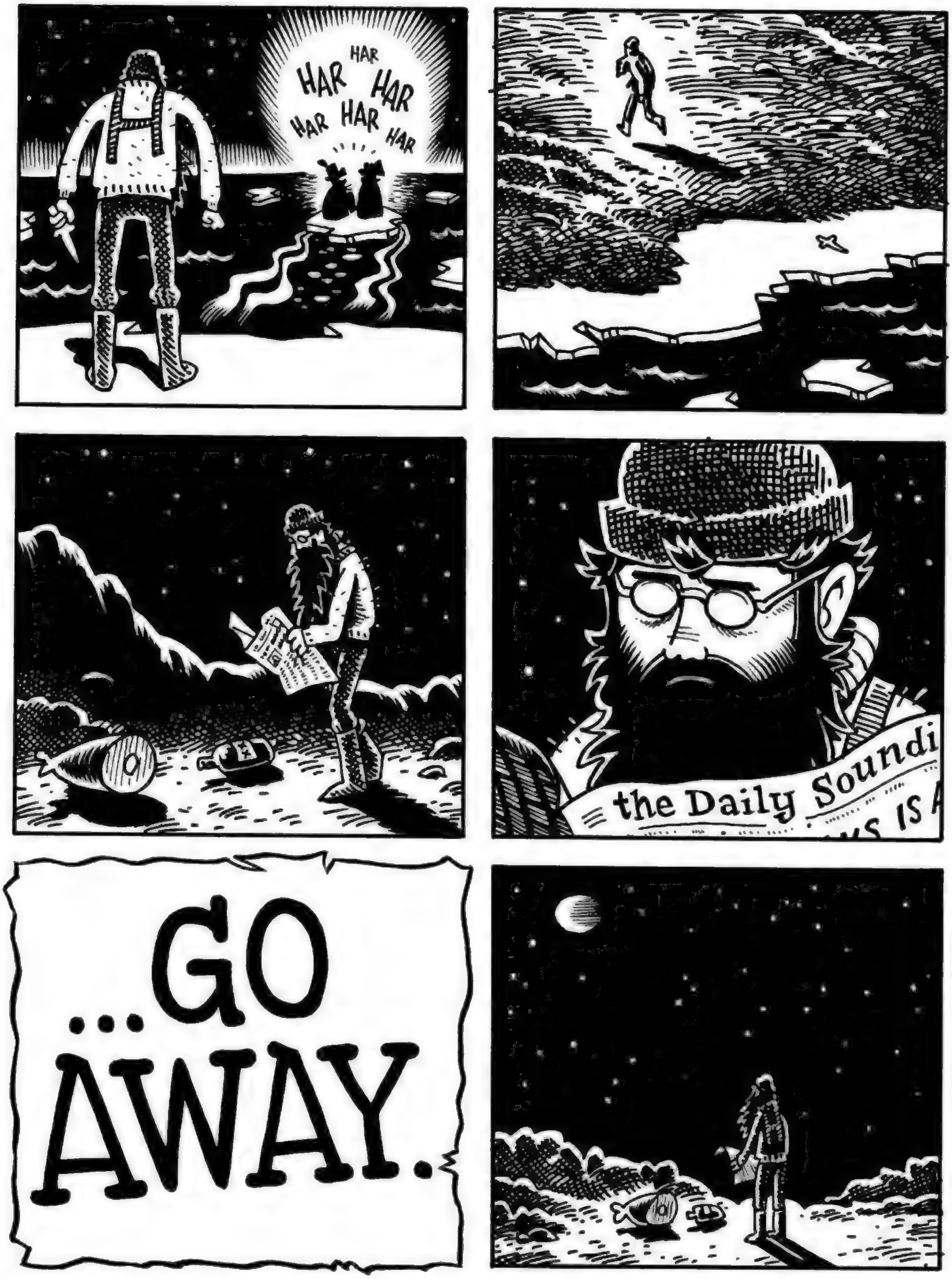

"...please, Mr. Shanks, just GO AWAY."
HIC
WOW, THAT SEEMS HARSH.
WELL, IF YER GONNA BLAME SOMEBODY...
the Daily Sounding
THIS MAN SHANKS IS A MENACE!!!
HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR HA HA
...BLAME THE RECLUSE!
SHHH! WE'RE HERE! YOU READY?
ALMOST -- LET ME WARM UP!
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE HIS REACTION...


"...ASSUMING THE POOR BASTARD'S STILL **ALIVE**!"
KNOCK!
KNOCK!
KNOCK!
KNO
Chopin
15
KNOCK
EH?
VAGRANT VIKIN

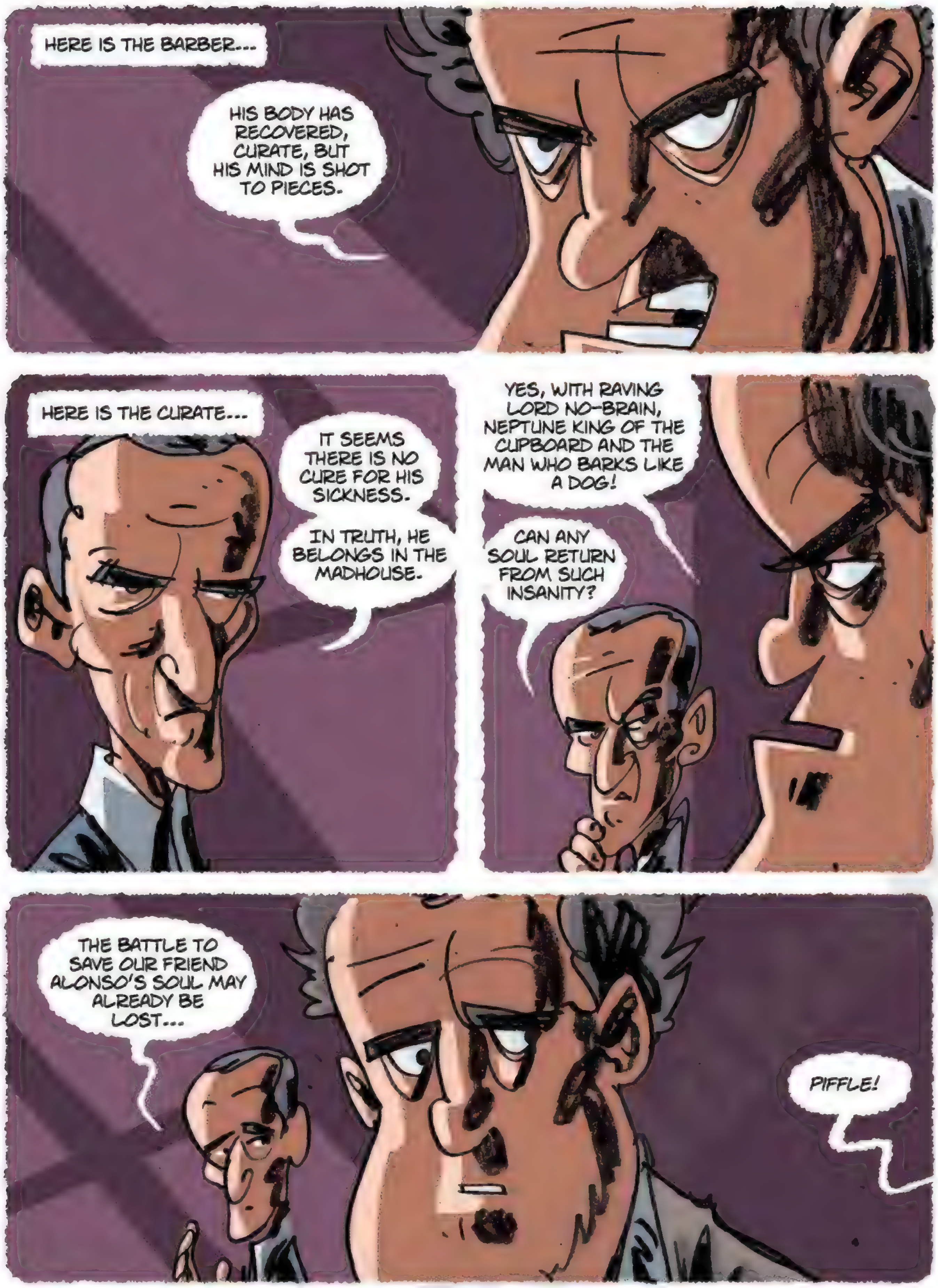

KNO
KN
KNOC
HURRY UP! LET'S GO!
HAR HAR HA HAR HA HAK HAR
SNICKER!
GIGGLE!
SNICKE
ICKER!
SNI

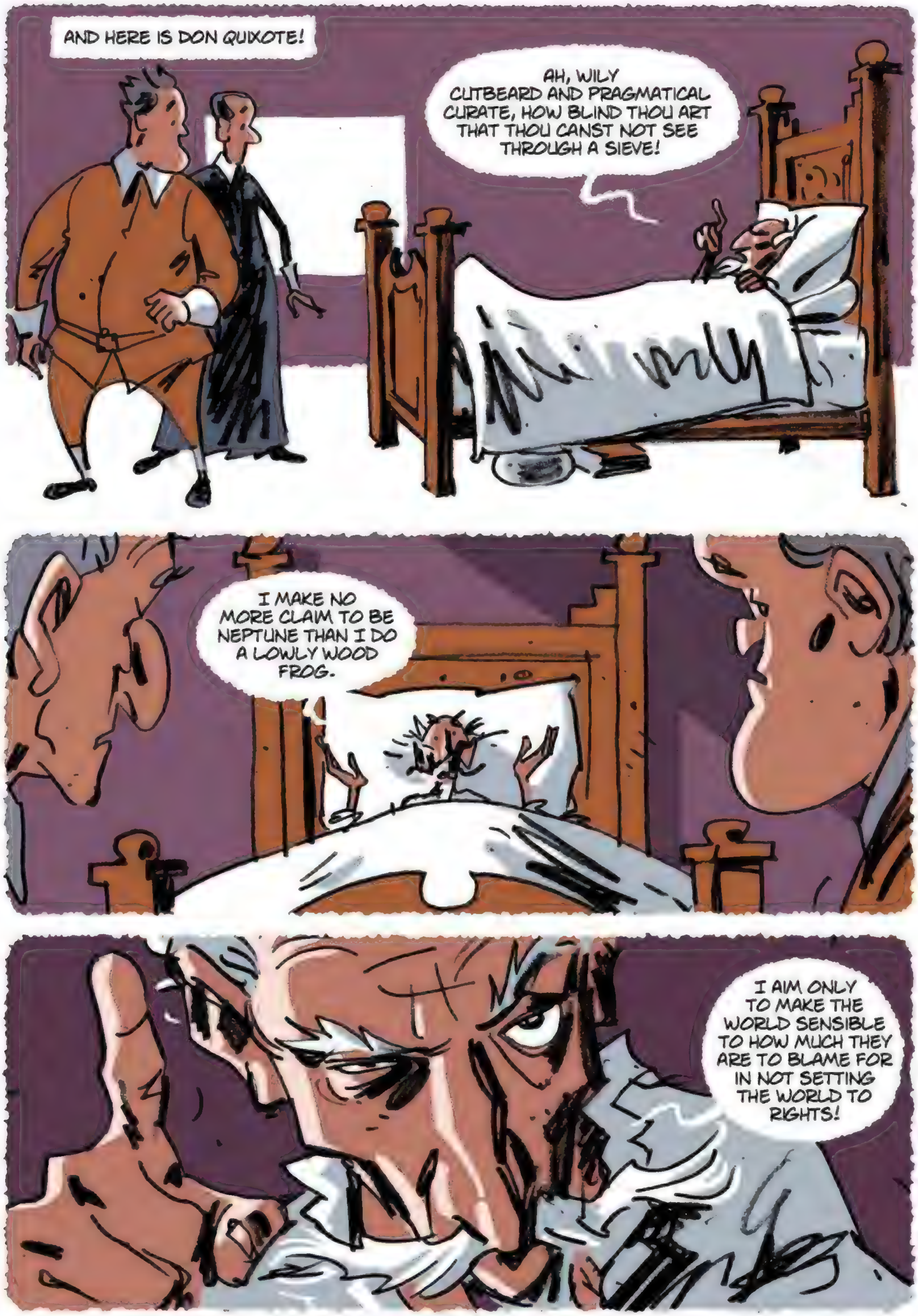

REACH INSIDE
EW.
MOLD INTO KNIFE
FREEZE...
...FREEZE...
...FROZEN!!

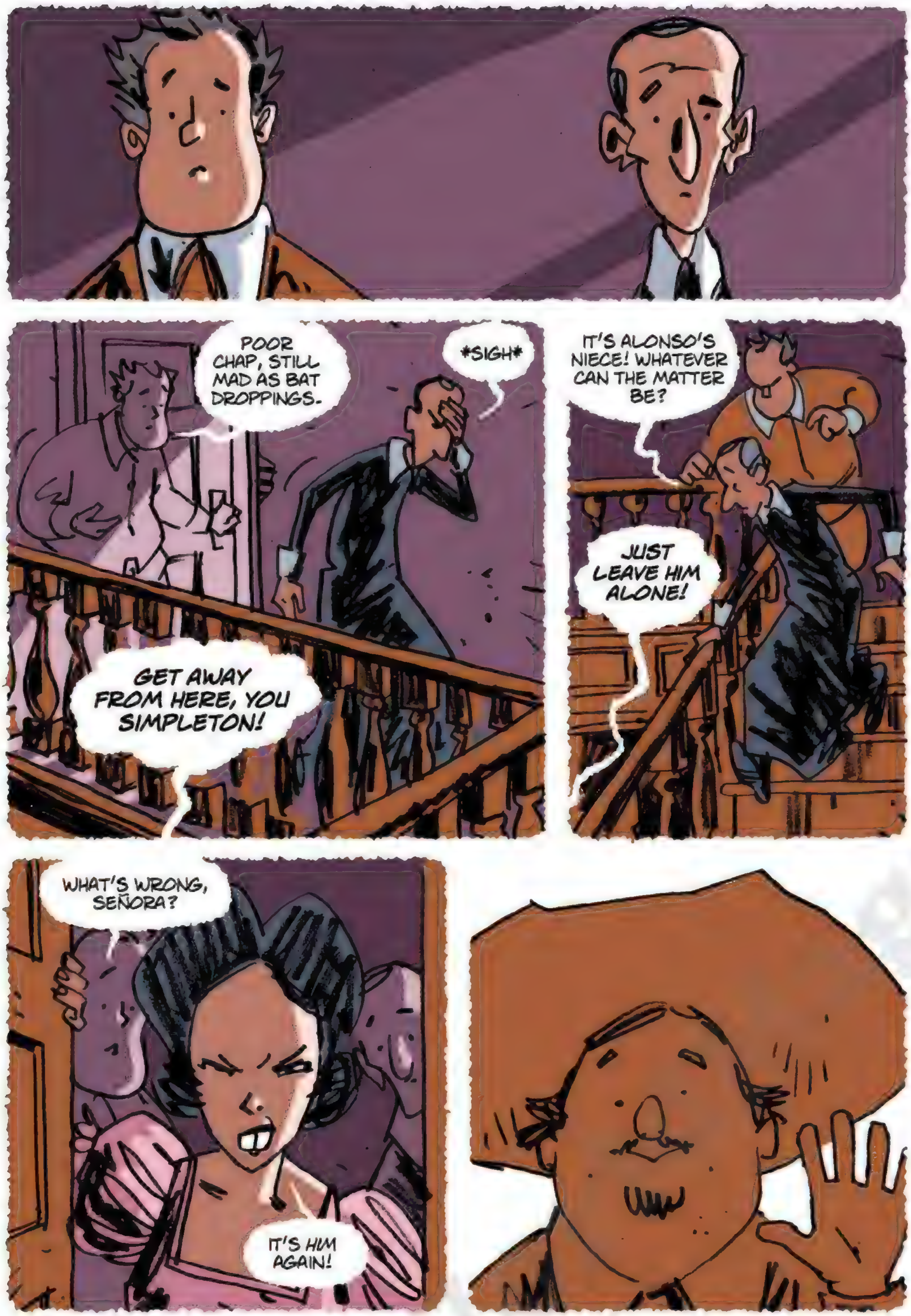

!
!
SWING!
LEAP!

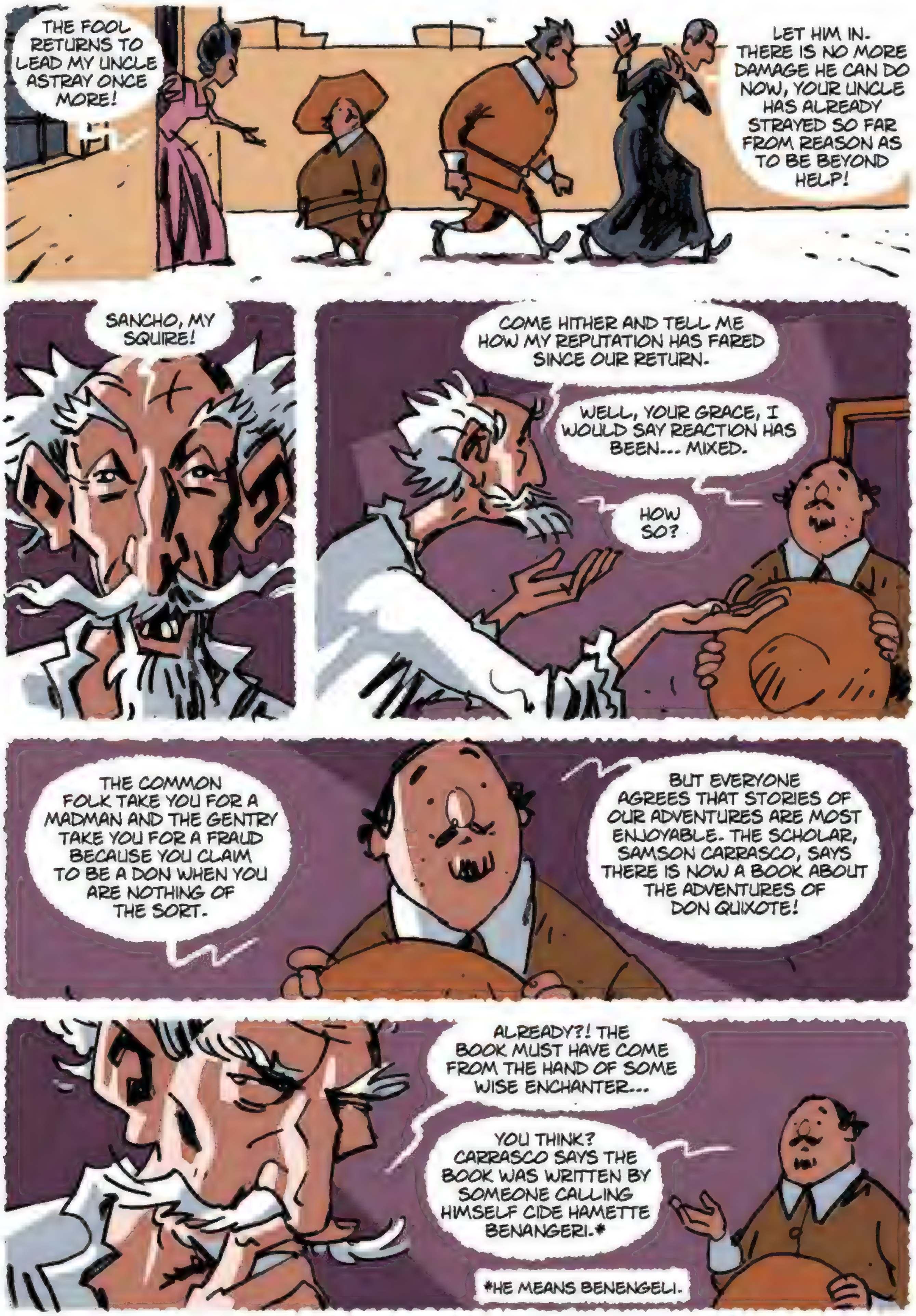

HAR HAR HAR
HAR HAR HAR
the Daily Soundi
S IS A
...GO AWAY.

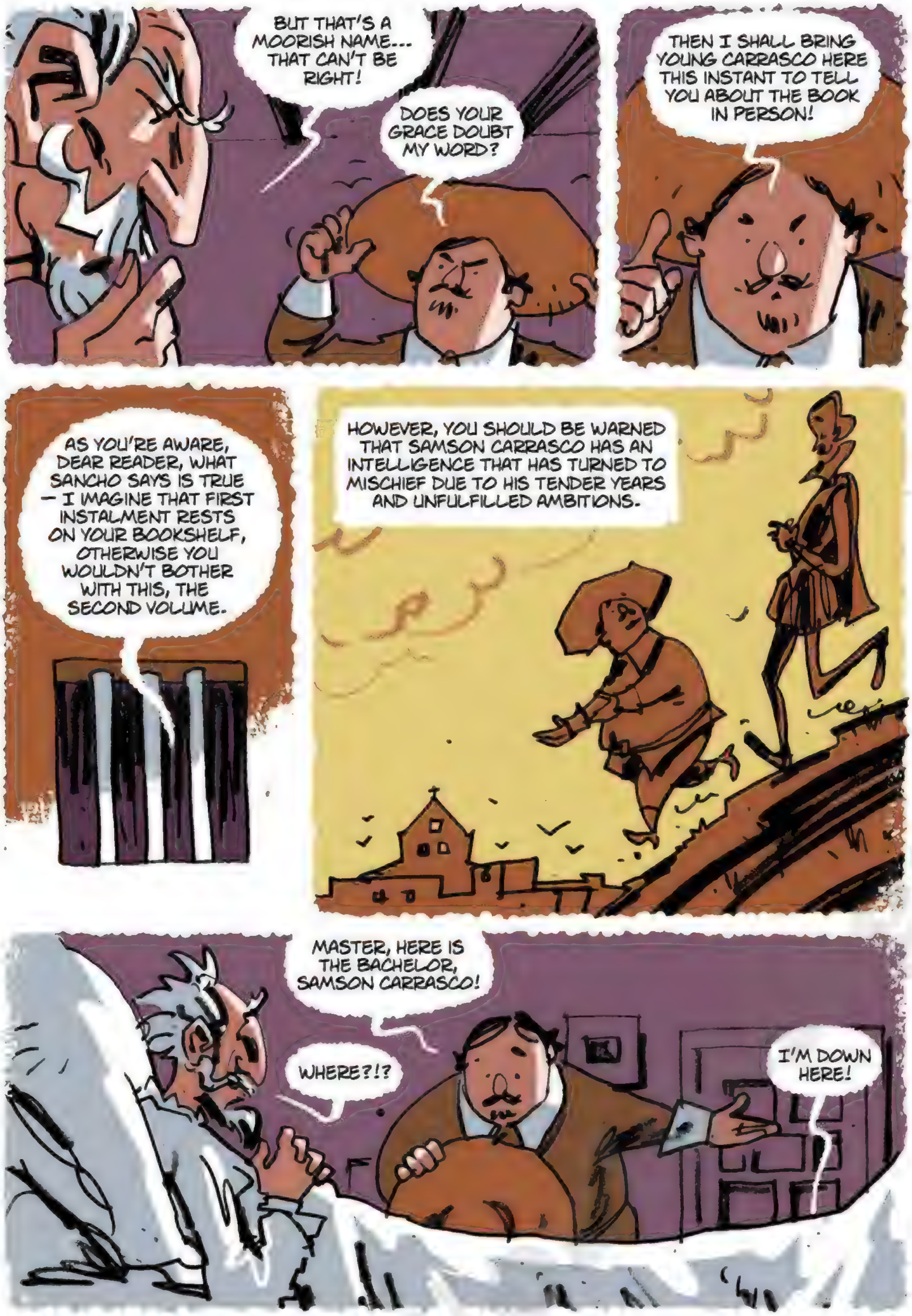
Chapter One

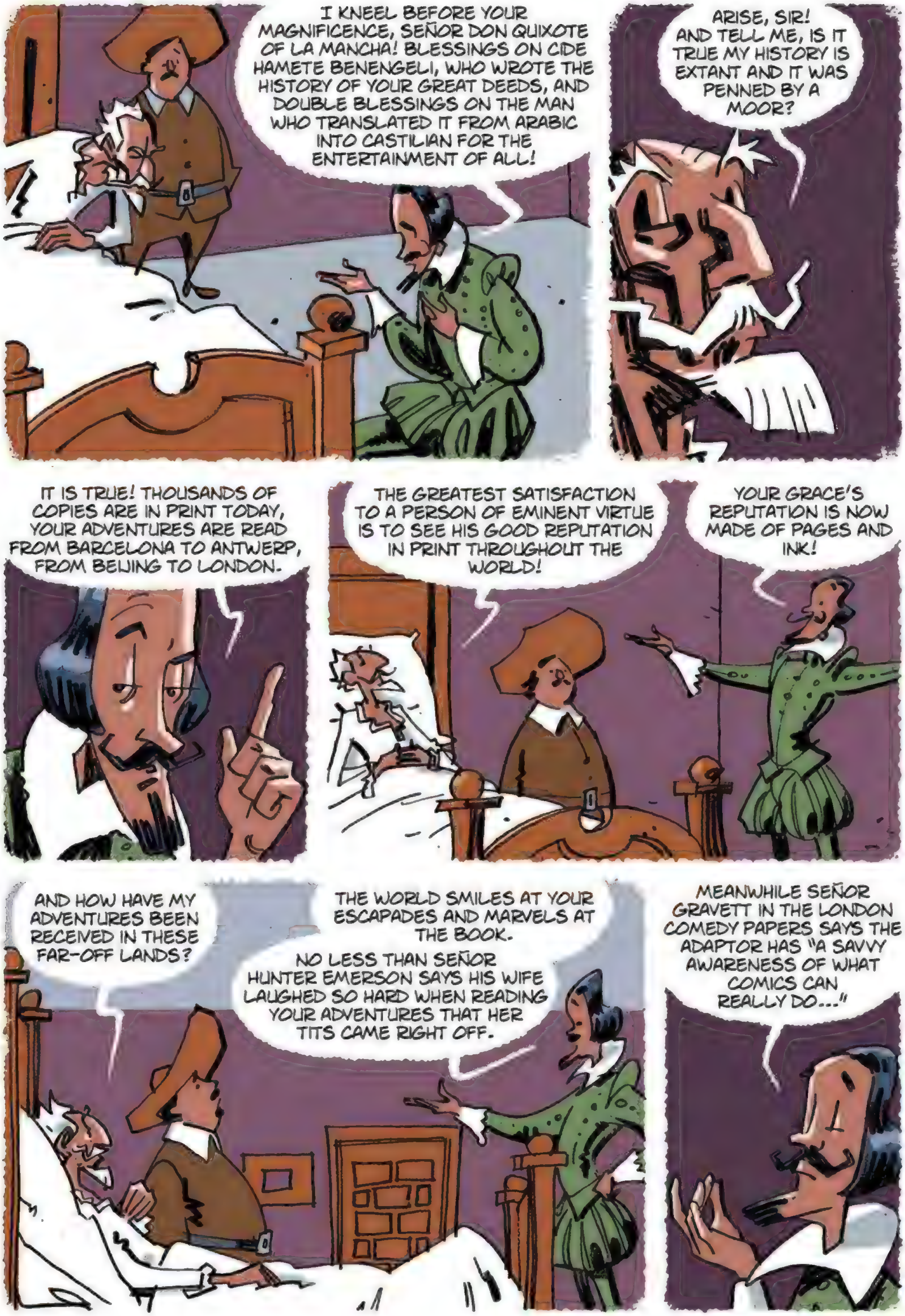

HERE IS THE BARBER...
HIS BODY HAS RECOVERED, CURATE, BUT HIS MIND IS SHOT TO PIECES.
HERE IS THE CURATE...
IT SEEMS THERE IS NO CURE FOR HIS SICKNESS.
IN TRUTH, HE BELONGS IN THE MADHOUSE.
YES, WITH RAVING LORD NO-BRAIN, NEPTUNE KING OF THE CUPBOARD AND THE MAN WHO BARKS LIKE A DOG!
CAN ANY SOUL RETURN FROM SUCH INSANITY?
THE BATTLE TO SAVE OUR FRIEND ALONSO'S SOUL MAY ALREADY BE LOST...
PIFFLE!


AND HERE IS DON QUIXOTE!
AH, WILY CUTBEARD AND PRAGMATICAL CURATE, HOW BLIND THOU ART THAT THOU CANST NOT SEE THROUGH A SIEVE!
I MAKE NO MORE CLAIM TO BE NEPTUNE THAN I DO A LOWLY WOOD FROG.
I AIM ONLY TO MAKE THE WORLD SENSIBLE TO HOW MUCH THEY ARE TO BLAME FOR IN NOT SETTING THE WORLD TO RIGHTS!

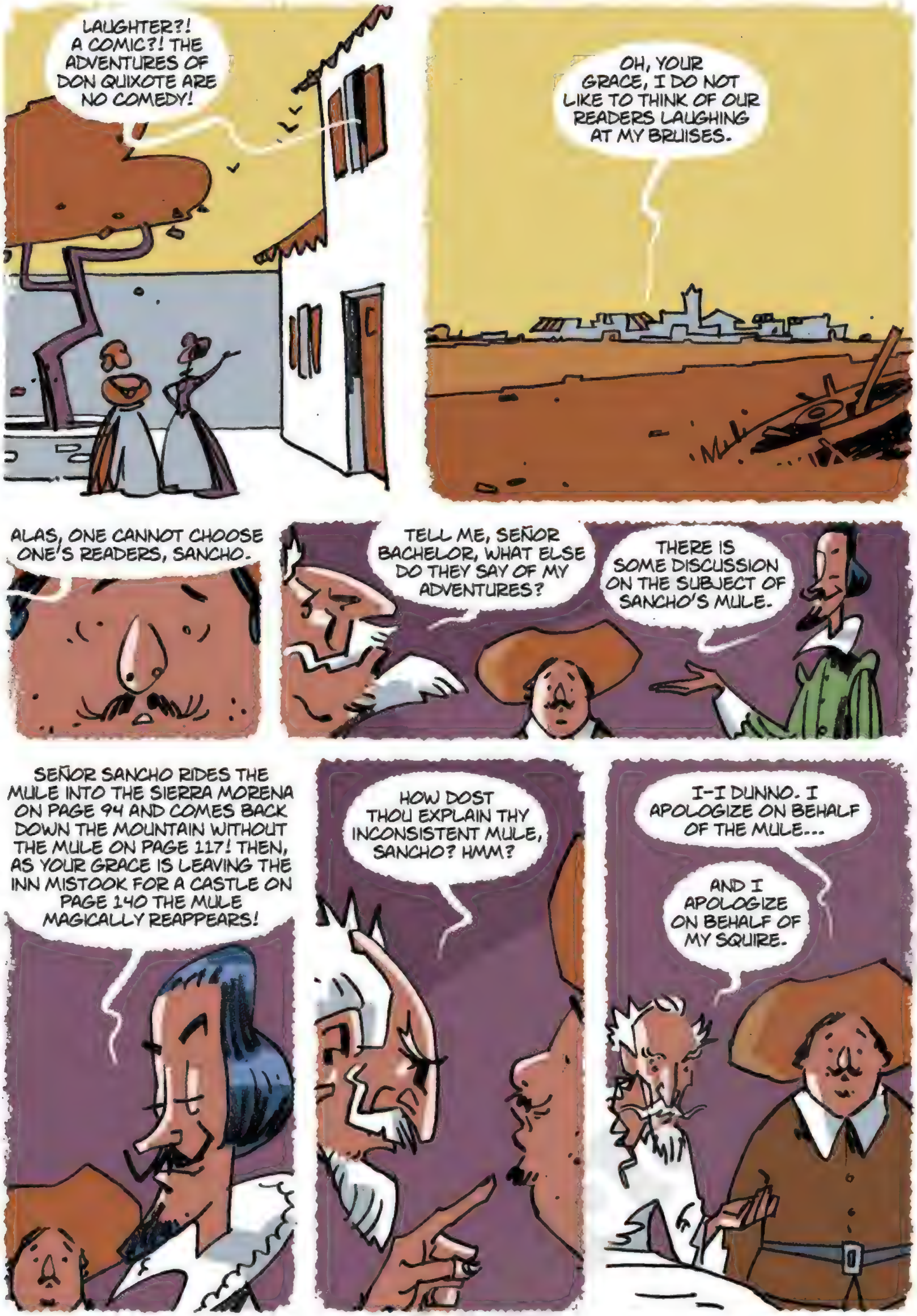

POOR CHAP, STILL MAD AS BAT DROPPINGS.
SIGH
GET AWAY FROM HERE, YOU SIMPLETON!
IT'S ALONSO'S NIECE! WHATEVER CAN THE MATTER BE?
JUST LEAVE HIM ALONE!
WHAT'S WRONG, SEÑORA?
IT'S HIM AGAIN!

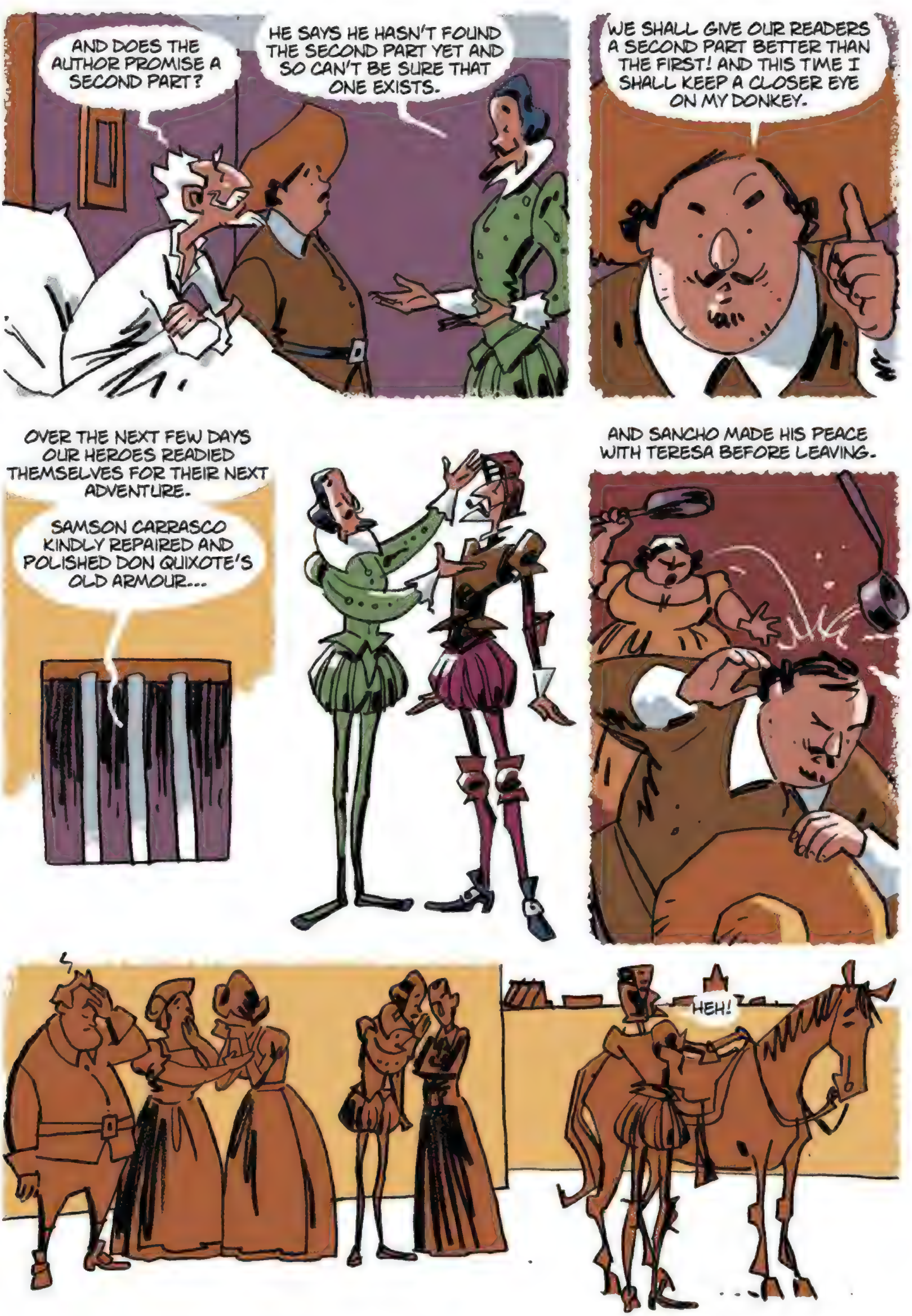

THE FOOL RETURNS TO LEAD MY UNCLE ASTRAY ONCE MORE!
LET HIM IN. THERE IS NO MORE DAMAGE HE CAN DO NOW, YOUR UNCLE HAS ALREADY STRAYED SO FAR FROM REASON AS TO BE BEYOND HELP!
SANCHO, MY SQUIRE!
COME HITHER AND TELL ME HOW MY REPUTATION HAS FARED SINCE OUR RETURN.
WELL, YOUR GRACE, I WOULD SAY REACTION HAS BEEN... MIXED.
HOW SO?
THE COMMON FOLK TAKE YOU FOR A MADMAN AND THE GENTRY TAKE YOU FOR A FRAUD BECAUSE YOU CLAIM TO BE A DON WHEN YOU ARE NOTHING OF THE SORT.
BUT EVERYONE AGREES THAT STORIES OF OUR ADVENTURES ARE MOST ENJOYABLE. THE SCHOLAR, SAMSON CARRASCO, SAYS THERE IS NOW A BOOK ABOUT THE ADVENTURES OF DON QUIXOTE!
ALREADY?! THE BOOK MUST HAVE COME FROM THE HAND OF SOME WISE ENCHANTER...
YOU THINK? CARRASCO SAYS THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN BY SOMEONE CALLING HIMSELF CIDE HAMETTE BENANGERI.*
*HE MEANS BENENGELI.


BUT THAT'S A MOORISH NAME... THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT!
DOES YOUR GRACE DOUBT MY WORD?
THEN I SHALL BRING YOUNG CARRASCO HERE THIS INSTANT TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE BOOK IN PERSON!
AS YOU'RE AWARE, DEAR READER, WHAT SANCHO SAYS IS TRUE — I IMAGINE THAT FIRST INSTALMENT RESTS ON YOUR BOOKSHELF, OTHERWISE YOU WOULDN'T BOTHER WITH THIS, THE SECOND VOLUME.
HOWEVER, YOU SHOULD BE WARNED THAT SAMSON CARRASCO HAS AN INTELLIGENCE THAT HAS TURNED TO MISCHIEF DUE TO HIS TENDER YEARS AND UNFULFILLED AMBITIONS.
MASTER, HERE IS THE BACHELOR, SAMSON CARRASCO!
WHERE?!?
I'M DOWN HERE!

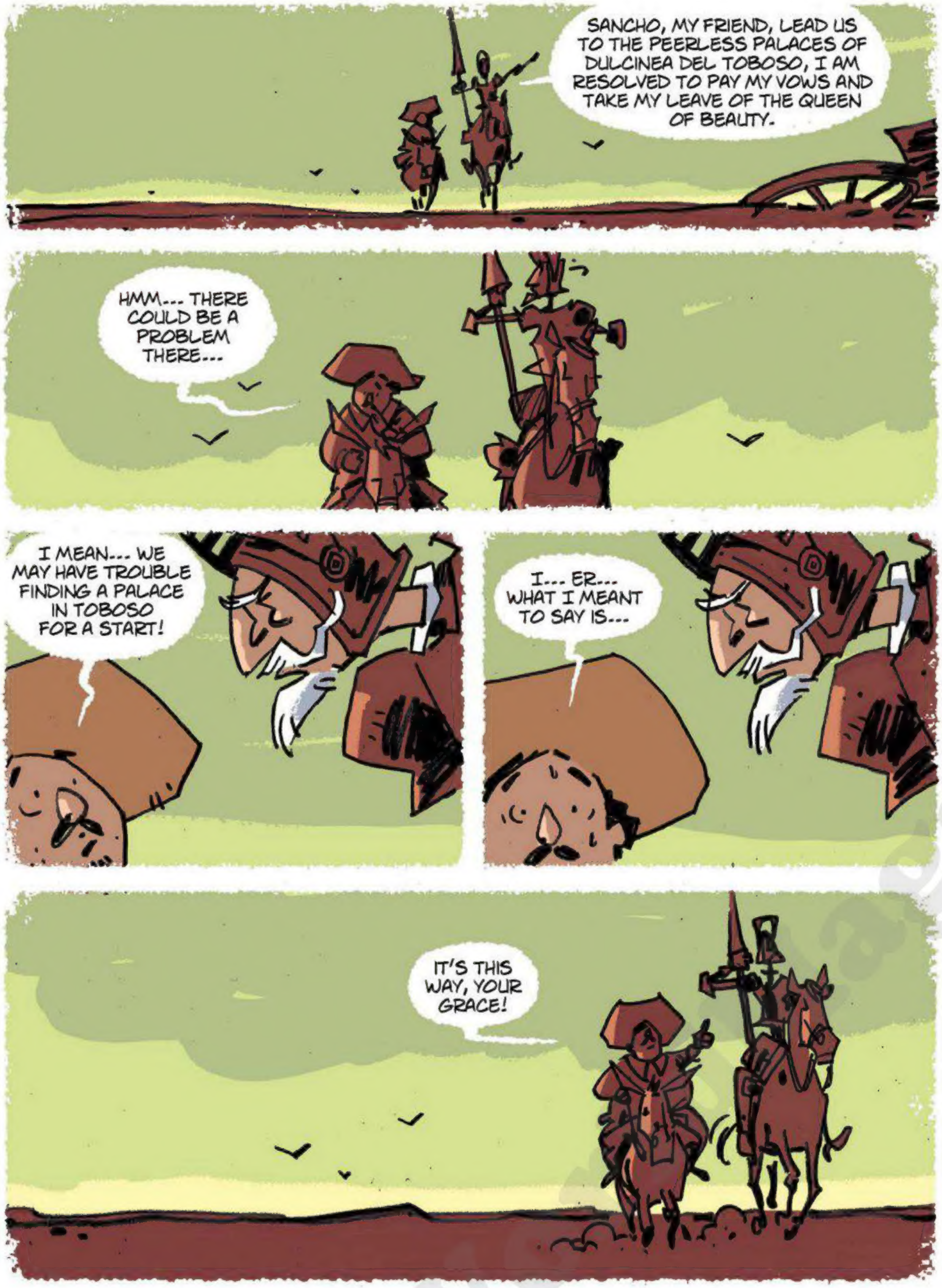


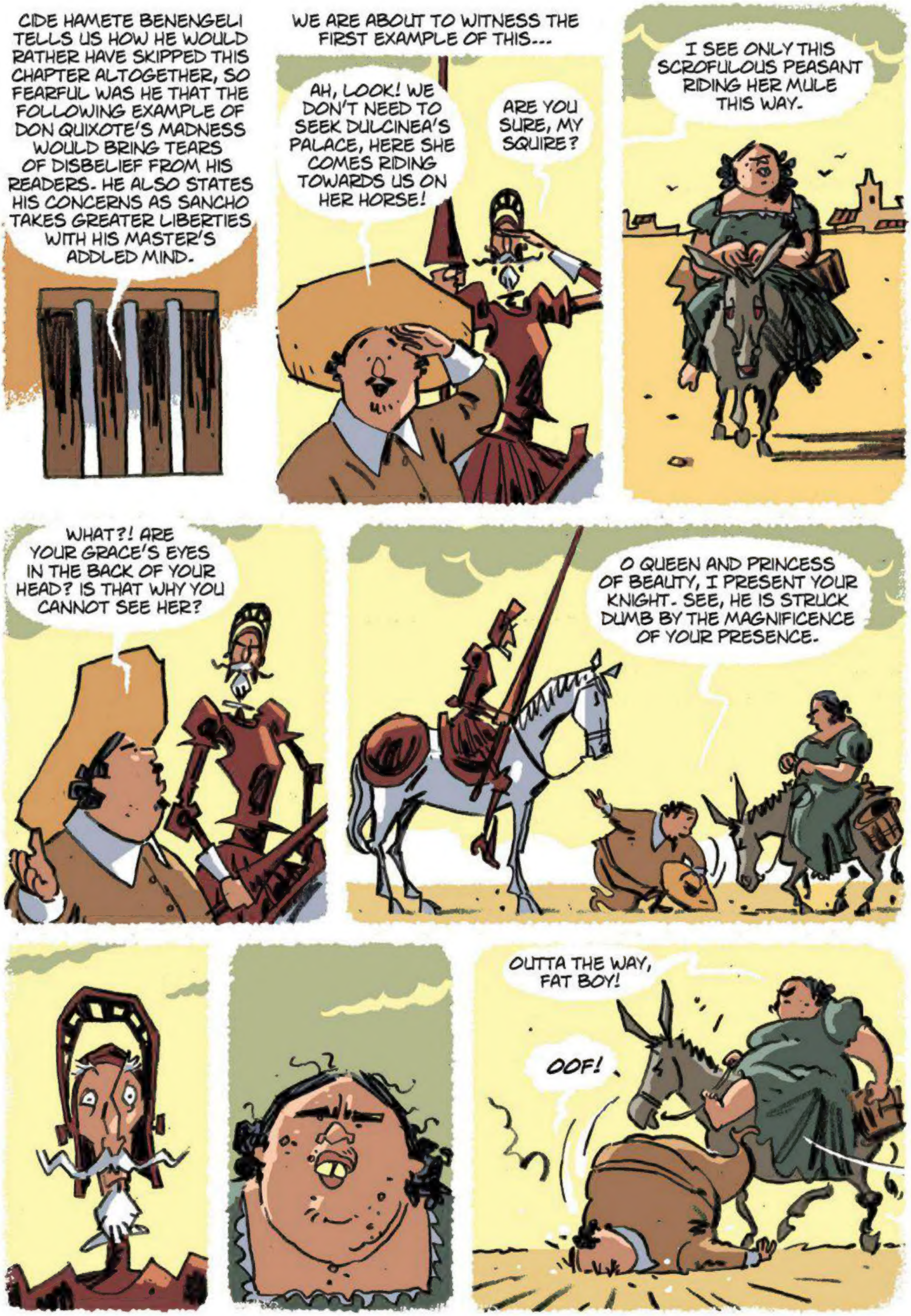
I KNEEL BEFORE YOUR MAGNIFICENCE, SEÑOR DON QUIXOTE OF LA MANCHA! BLESSINGS ON CIDE HAMETE BENENGELI, WHO WROTE THE HISTORY OF YOUR GREAT DEEDS, AND DOUBLE BLESSINGS ON THE MAN WHO TRANSLATED IT FROM ARABIC INTO CASTILIAN FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT OF ALL!
ARISE, SIR! AND TELL ME, IS IT TRUE MY HISTORY IS EXTANT AND IT WAS PENNED BY A MOOR?
IT IS TRUE! THOUSANDS OF COPIES ARE IN PRINT TODAY, YOUR ADVENTURES ARE READ FROM BARCELONA TO ANTWERP, FROM BEIJING TO LONDON.
THE GREATEST SATISFACTION TO A PERSON OF EMINENT VIRTUE IS TO SEE HIS GOOD REPUTATION IN PRINT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD!
YOUR GRACE'S REPUTATION IS NOW MADE OF PAGES AND INK!
AND HOW HAVE MY ADVENTURES BEEN RECEIVED IN THESE FAR-OFF LANDS?
THE WORLD SMILES AT YOUR ESCAPADES AND MARVELS AT THE BOOK.
NO LESS THAN SEÑOR HUNTER EMERSON SAYS HIS WIFE LAUGHED SO HARD WHEN READING YOUR ADVENTURES THAT HER TITS CAME RIGHT OFF.
MEANWHILE SEÑOR GRAVETT IN THE LONDON COMEDY PAPERS SAYS THE ADAPTOR HAS "A SAVVY AWARENESS OF WHAT COMICS CAN REALLY DO..."

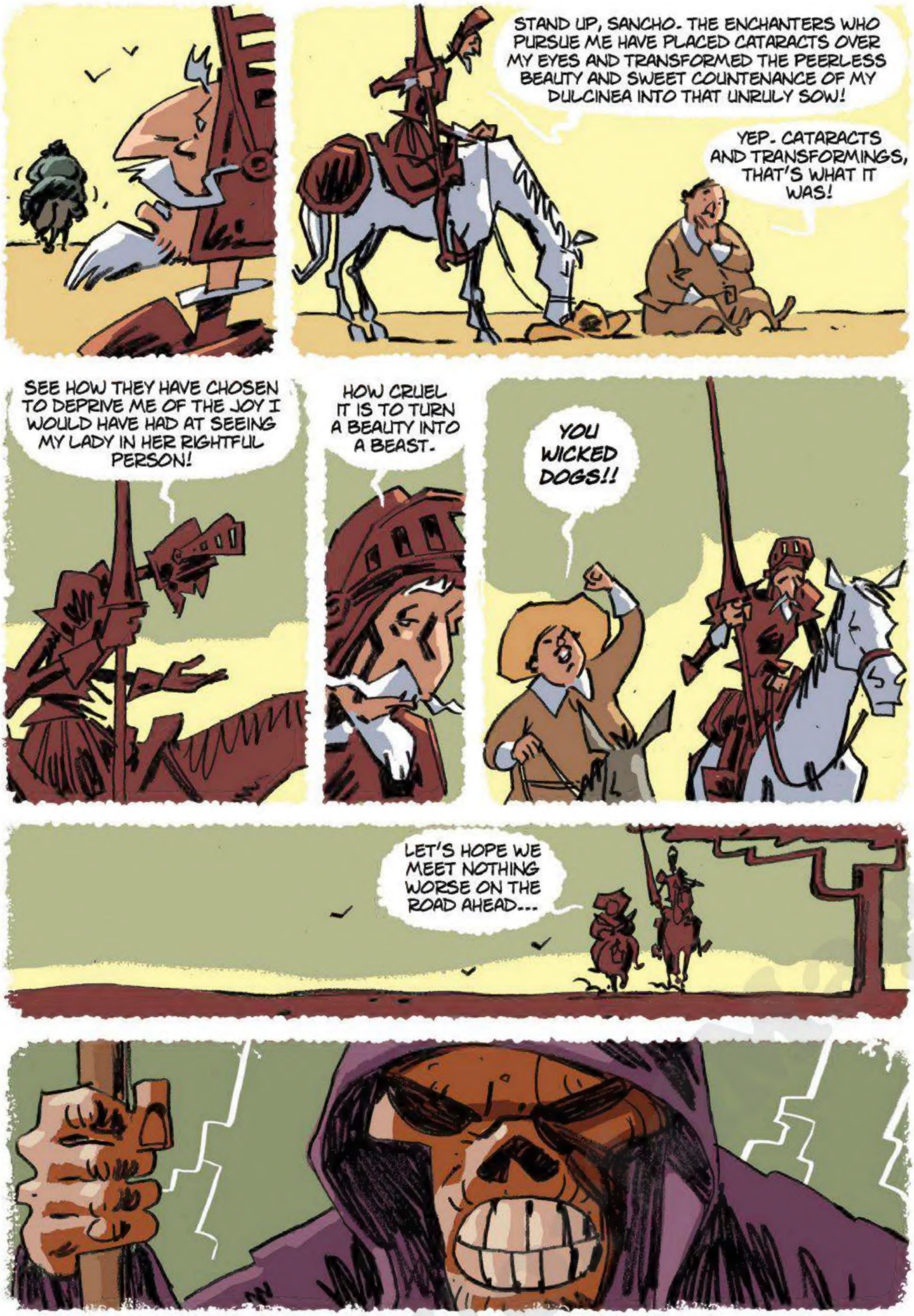

LAUGHTER?! A COMIC?! THE ADVENTURES OF DON QUIXOTE ARE NO COMEDY!
OH, YOUR GRACE, I DO NOT LIKE TO THINK OF OUR READERS LAUGHING AT MY BRUISES.
ALAS, ONE CANNOT CHOOSE ONE'S READERS, SANCHO.
TELL ME, SEÑOR BACHELOR, WHAT ELSE DO THEY SAY OF MY ADVENTURES?
THERE IS SOME DISCUSSION ON THE SUBJECT OF SANCHO'S MULE.
SEÑOR SANCHO RIDES THE MULE INTO THE SIERRA MORENA ON PAGE 94 AND COMES BACK DOWN THE MOUNTAIN WITHOUT THE MULE ON PAGE 117! THEN, AS YOUR GRACE IS LEAVING THE INN MISTOOK FOR A CASTLE ON PAGE 140 THE MULE MAGICALLY REAPPEARS!
HOW DOST THOU EXPLAIN THY INCONSISTENT MULE, SANCHO? HMM?
I-I DUNNO. I APOLOGIZE ON BEHALF OF THE MULE...
AND I APOLOGIZE ON BEHALF OF MY SQUIRE.


AND DOES THE AUTHOR PROMISE A SECOND PART?
HE SAYS HE HASN'T FOUND THE SECOND PART YET AND SO CAN'T BE SURE THAT ONE EXISTS.
WE SHALL GIVE OUR READERS A SECOND PART BETTER THAN THE FIRST! AND THIS TIME I SHALL KEEP A CLOSER EYE ON MY DONKEY.
OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS OUR HEROES READIED THEMSELVES FOR THEIR NEXT ADVENTURE.
SAMSON CARRASCO KINDLY REPAIRED AND POLISHED DON QUIXOTE'S OLD ARMOUR...
AND SANCHO MADE HIS PEACE WITH TERESA BEFORE LEAVING.
HEH!

Chapter Two


SANCHO, MY FRIEND, LEAD US TO THE PEERLESS PALACES OF DULCINEA DEL TOBOSO, I AM RESOLVED TO PAY MY VOWS AND TAKE MY LEAVE OF THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY.
HMM... THERE COULD BE A PROBLEM THERE...
I MEAN... WE MAY HAVE TROUBLE FINDING A PALACE IN TOBOSO FOR A START!
I... ER... WHAT I MEANT TO SAY IS...
IT'S THIS WAY, YOUR GRACE!

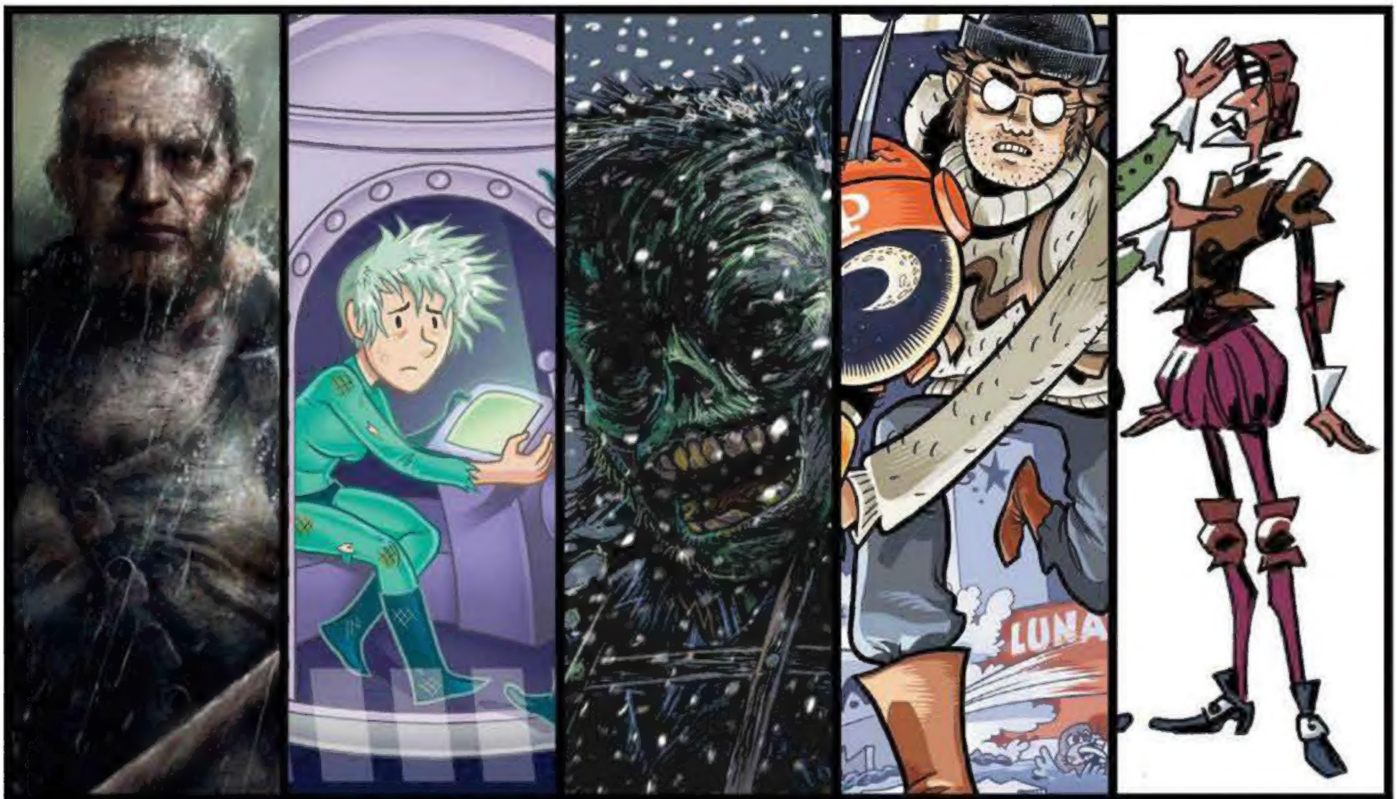

CIDE HAMETE BENENGELI TELLS US HOW HE WOULD RATHER HAVE SKIPPED THIS CHAPTER ALTOGETHER, SO FEARFUL WAS HE THAT THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE OF DON QUIXOTE'S MADNESS WOULD BRING TEARS OF DISBELIEF FROM HIS READERS. HE ALSO STATES HIS CONCERNS AS SANCHO TAKES GREATER LIBERTIES WITH HIS MASTER'S ADDLED MIND.
WE ARE ABOUT TO WITNESS THE FIRST EXAMPLE OF THIS...
AH, LOOK! WE DON'T NEED TO SEEK DULCINEA'S PALACE, HERE SHE COMES RIDING TOWARDS US ON HER HORSE!
ARE YOU SURE, MY SQUIRE?
I SEE ONLY THIS SCROFULOUS PEASANT RIDING HER MULE THIS WAY.
WHAT?! ARE YOUR GRACE'S EYES IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD? IS THAT WHY YOU CANNOT SEE HER?
O QUEEN AND PRINCESS OF BEAUTY, I PRESENT YOUR KNIGHT. SEE, HE IS STRUCK DUMB BY THE MAGNIFICENCE OF YOUR PRESENCE.
OUTTA THE WAY, FAT BOY!
OOF!


STAND UP, SANCHO. THE ENCHANTERS WHO PURSUE ME HAVE PLACED CATARACTS OVER MY EYES AND TRANSFORMED THE PEERLESS BEAUTY AND SWEET COUNTENANCE OF MY DULCINEA INTO THAT UNRULY SOW!
YEP. CATARACTS AND TRANSFORMINGS, THAT'S WHAT IT WAS!
SEE HOW THEY HAVE CHOSEN TO DEPRIVE ME OF THE JOY I WOULD HAVE HAD AT SEEING MY LADY IN HER RIGHTFUL PERSON!
HOW CRUEL IT IS TO TURN A BEAUTY INTO A BEAST.
YOU WICKED DOGS!!
LET'S HOPE WE MEET NOTHING WORSE ON THE ROAD AHEAD...

GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK

NEW! BRILLIANT! HEAVING WITH TALENT!

Sidekick's still super-sized, and it's just as rammed with amazing adventures...



Inside the fifth issue of your new, improved Giant-Size Sidekick...

Nick Percival was once a fixture at *2000 AD*, contributing spectacular painted art to major strips like *Judge Dredd* and *Sláine*, but more recently he's worked in animation, for the movies, and providing covers only. Now, however, he returns to regular comics with a new creator owned series set in a mysterious hellworld – is this a ruined Earth, or something else? – where negative emotions take physical form and survival is a day-by-day concern. Banding together to survive: Father, Mother, Son and Daughter – *The Family*. The first graphic novel in an ongoing series is available in France this summer, and will appear in English later – but you can sample it first here!

Also in this issue:
We've got sexy time-travel high-jinx in *We Can Fix It!: A Time Travel Memoir* by Jess Fink (Jess travels back to share hard-won wisdom with her naive, horny teenage self – uh oh!). We've got a new adaptation of Victor Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs* by David Hine and Mark Stafford (the 1928 film version was instrumental in inspiring the look of the Joker!). We've got Kevin Cannon's *Crater XV*, telling of the Cold War adventures of salty Arctic seadog Army Shanks (expect moon bases, killer walruses and yacht chases). And we've got *Don Quixote* Vol 2, Rob Davis' take on Cervantes' classic. (What will become of Sancho Panza?)

The Family

We Can Fix It!

The Man Who Laughs

Crater XV

Don Quixote Vol 2